

A SOLDIER'S TRIAL

A STORY OF
THE CANTEEN CRUSADE

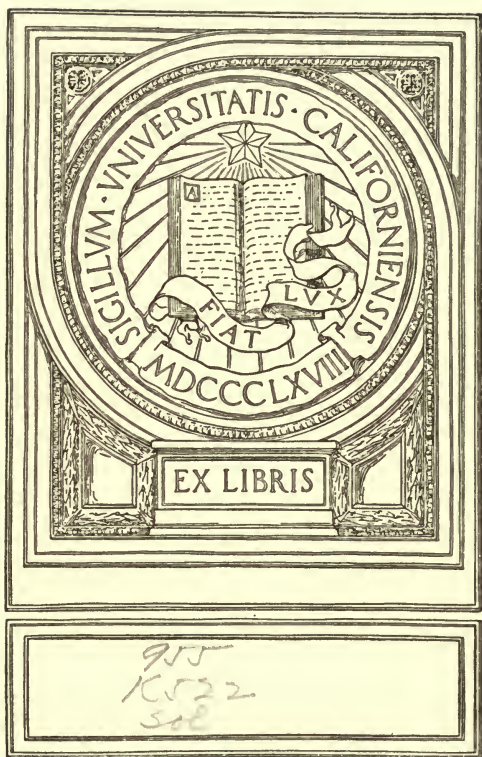
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A SOLDIER'S TRIAL



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A SOLDIER'S TRIAL

AN EPISODE OF
The Canteen Crusade

BY
GENERAL CHARLES KING

AUTHOR OF "A DAUGHTER OF THE SIOUX," "COMRADE
IN ARMS," "THE MEDAL OF HONOR," ETC.

BRIG.-GEN. FREDERICK D. GRANT, U.S.A., SAYS:
"IT IS DISTRESSING THAT THE PRESENCE OF THE
KEEPERS OF VILE RESORTS IS ONE OF THE ACTIVITY
OF GOOD AND WORTHY THROUGH MARCHING CITIZENS,
WHO HAVE SUCCEEDED IN ABOLISHING THE CANTEEN
IN THE ARMY."

NEW YORK
THE HOBART COMPANY

1905

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ALBANY, N. Y.

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A SOLDIER'S TRIAL

CHAPTER I.

TWO ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE war with Spain was at an end, and so were the hopes and aspirations of many a warrior. For several reasons Colonel Ray of the —th Kentucky was a disappointed man. One of the best soldiers doing duty with the volunteers, he had had some of the worst luck. Through long years of service in the regular cavalry he had borne the reputation of being a most energetic and valuable officer. He had won a name as an Indian fighter the Indians themselves respected. He had campaigned all over the frontier before the railways came and conquered. He knew Arizona and New Mexico even better than his native State, and was known from the upper Missouri to the lower Colorado far more generally than in the “blue grass” country of his boy days. Apache and Arapahoe, Comanche and Cheyenne, Sioux and Shoshone, they all had met, and many had measured spear with, the dark-eyed, curly-headed Kentucky light-horseman. He bore the scars of more than one sharp encounter; had given more

than he had received, yet found himself in no wise blessed with profit or promotion. The Civil War was fairly ended when he stepped from the Point into his first commission. Over thirty years had he done valiant and faithful duty in the line, yet was he only just wearing the gold leaves as junior major of his regiment, when the long-expected happened in the spring of '98, and the nation called out its first levy of volunteers. Slow as had been his advancement, it was phenomenally swift as compared with that of classmates who, choosing the artillery arm, had languished those thirty years in the line of file closers. Ray had no complaint to make. He was even rejoiceful in his luck when called to Kentucky to command one of her regiments of volunteer infantry. He was, indeed, among the few envied men in the army where so very few have anything to excite the cupidity of their kind. His record and reputation were things no man could undermine, though some might underestimate. His temperament was sweet and sunny. He had long been happily, most happily, married. His wife was charming, admired, and beloved. His children were all a father's heart could wish. Health and competence had always been theirs. They had, indeed, for years known the joys of moderate wealth, for Mrs. Ray had brought her husband something besides beauty and grace, physical and spiritual. The Marion Sanford of the Centennial year of '76 was reputed an heiress, and the children that had come in course of time to bless their union were

certainly born to the purple. But army people of those days lived long years in the far West, had to trust their business affairs to agents in the far East, and some agents could not stand such prosperity. Mrs. Ray's property was mainly in real estate, some of which became gradually unproductive. Then there came the financial storm of '93, and a subsequent flitting of financial agents, some to the convenient Canadas, some to the Spanish Main.

Then another thing happened, almost whimsical in the way of retributive justice where Mrs. Ray's relatives were concerned. That the resultant burden should have been saddled on her cavalry husband was perhaps not quite so diverting. There were several of Mrs. Ray's nearest of kin who had by no means approved of her marriage in the army, and to a nameless, moneyless subaltern at that. "He will make ducks and drakes of her fortune," said they. "He will drink and gamble it away," said certain others. Ray had possibly heard, had probably expected this. At all events he had steadfastly declined to use his wife's money. He had gone so far as to grieve her not a little by very gently, but very firmly, declining to undertake the management of her property. That was all left in the hands of her people. It was the agent of their choice who made ducks and drakes of much of it, as well as of their own, and, at the time the Spanish War broke out, from his pay as major in the line of the army "Billy" Ray was contributing to the support of certain of the children of his former detractors.

Then came partial relief. "Sandy" Ray, their eldest son, commissioned like his father in the cavalry, was no longer to be provided for. Indeed, he was sending every month a certain quarter of his salary direct to his mother to repay her for moneys advanced for him when they were much needed. Maidie Ray, their lovely dark-eyed daughter, had married the man of her choice, a well-to-do young New Yorker of most excellent family. There was only Billy, Junior, among their olive branches now to be provided for until he could look out for himself. There was even prospect of his being sent to West Point within the year to make a try at that which had proved too hard a problem for his unmathematical elder brother, for Sandy had worn cadet gray long enough to get much of the practical teaching of our famous school, though he could not assimilate the requisite amount of the theoretical. It was the year after the surrender of Santiago and the muster out of most of the State volunteers that, in the goodness of his heart, Colonel Ray turned to Marion, his wife, and said:

"Why not have Beth and 'Cilla come to us?"—and thereby hangs very much of this tale.

"Beth," be it said at once, did not come, for, even in her reduced circumstances and somewhat mature years, this excellent woman was sought by an old admirer, once deemed ineligible. Beth wrote thankfully and appreciatively to Uncle Will and dear Aunt Marion: "The Doctor has returned to New Jersey and—the old subject."

There was now no stern parent to say him nay, and she—could not. But Priscilla would gladly and gratefully come, and, whether or no Priscilla was grateful, Priscilla proved assuredly glad, for Priscilla was a woman with a mission and long in search of a field. Priscilla had often marveled at Aunt Marion's blindness in not having earlier looked to her as the best possible guide, example, and companion for Aunt Marion's most interesting if much-indulged brood. Priscilla never doubted her powers, and never dreamed of the instant protests developed when, in mischievous mood, probably, papa had suggested having Cousin 'Cilla come to the frontier to help mother school the little Rays. All their recollections of that prematurely mature young kinswoman were somewhat appalling. They regarded her as healthy children are sure to look upon an elder cousin who seeks ever to improve her opportunities and their moral nature. Life had had no greater trial to the trio than those rare and even regrettable visits to mother's home and kindred where first they learned to know the superior gifts and graces of Cousin 'Cil.

It has been said that Colonel Ray, the Spanish part of the war ended, was a disappointed man, and that so was many another. Never waiting to see what might result from the general rally of the Filipino insurgents, following speedily the first general scatter, the government swiftly mustered out all the State volunteers not actually on duty in the distant islands, filled up the regulars with

raw recruits, and shipped them straightway, undisciplined, undrilled, across the wide Pacific. Then new regiments of volunteers were authorized,—National volunteers, instead of State,—and, though their field officers as a rule were chosen from the regular service, there were by no means enough to go around among the many deserving applicants. The forty odd colonelcies went, in most cases, to the right men, but there were many “left,” and Billy Ray was one. He had had no luck whatever with his Kentucky regiment. He had been sent to Chickamauga, and thence to Florida, and thence nowhere worth mentioning. They saw no service without the States; heard no hostile bullets whistle; found, like most of the State volunteers, they were to have no part in the Cuban campaign, and, that being the case, they wished to go home. They had n’t enlisted to play soldier, said they, and much as they admired and honored Colonel Ray, they could not be made to love soldier life that had no fighting. “Give us a chance to *do* something,” was their cry, “and we’ll stay till hell freezes over; but no more of this sort of thing for us.” Ray had tried hard to keep alive regimental interest and enthusiasm, but few could feel either interest or enthusiasm in a daily routine of drill, parade, and police duty in a hot, malarious Southern camp under Southern summer skies. Other regiments about them were getting orders to go home for muster out, and some of these individual Kentuckians had begun to go, too. If Ray could have moved them a few

miles away from the other camps, and close to the sparkling sea water, things might have gone better, but his original brigade commander, a regular whom he knew, and who knew him, had gotten orders for the Philippines, and gone.

He was succeeded by a brigadier whom Ray had never heard of, nor apparently had anybody else outside the contracted limits of his commonwealth, and this gentleman, having never before served with troops, and knowing nothing about modern military conditions, had imbibed his impressions from foreign pictorial papers. His conception of the functions of a general officer found concrete form in a daily circuit of his camps, mounted and accompanied by his full staff and escort. When not so occupied he sat in much state under the fly of his marquee, and had his colonels come and stand attention and listen to his homilies on the military art, which differed from anything they had previously conceived upon the subject. It was this unschooled, unskilled brigadier who turned down Ray's appeal to march his regiment five miles over to the seashore. The colonel of over thirty years' practical experience was being lectured by the general who had none. The unterrified Kentucky rank and file took to guying their civilian star-bearer. There were presently demonstrations that Ray could neither foresee nor prevent. The general thought he could and should, and so informed him, and likewise the division commander. Ray demanded investigation.

The division commander sought to smooth matters over, and failed. Ray resigned in disgust, sought orders to his own regiment, and found himself once again at the head of his squadron of regular troopers in the midst of scenes he loved. But his soul longed for action. He was offered a lieutenant-colonelcy of one of the national regiments of volunteers, but that was a step down, not up. It would have placed him under a colonel ten years younger than himself, and he said he preferred the gold leaves in the regulars to the silver in the volunteers, which ended for the present his prospects. Maidie's wedding, too, had something to do with the decision. But now that was over with, and here were he and Marion occupying delightful quarters at old Fort Minneconjou, with every prospect of soon being sent to the Philippines, where their colonel was commanding a division in the field, leaving Major Ray to look after the post, its men, and its military morals. Here it was, in the bracing air of the Dakotas and within range of the bold foothills and remoter pine-crested heights of the Sagamore, that they opened their hearts and doors to Mrs. Billy's niece, Priscilla Sanford, and affairs at Minneconjou, stagnant a while after the departure of the —d Infantry, once more became alive with interest, for Miss 'Cilla, as has been said, was a woman with a mission and, as perhaps should be said, with some thirty years to her credit, rather more than she had dollars.

Time had been when, with abundant means and few

cares, Miss Sanford busied herself in local charities and became a social power in her community. But with loss of money came lack of appreciation. She who had long managed the Mission kindergarten, and mainly financed it, was presently superseded as president of the board. She who had ever been foremost in the counsels of the Infants' Home and the St. Mary's Guild found herself gradually slighted in the matter of entertainments, etc., though still graciously permitted to do most of the clerical work.

For nearly a dozen years she had served as secretary and treasurer of the Young Woman's Church Aid and Temperance Union, a beneficent organization that still held many meetings but few converts. It had the backing of three or four wealthy congregations, however, and the control of a generous fund. When the year '94 was ushered in and the victims of the panic of '93 were enumerated, the case of Priscilla Sanford had excited prompt and rather widespread interest; but the sympathy that might have been as readily accorded was tempered by the reflection that Miss Sanford had ever been what they termed "bossy," by which it was by no means meant to imply that bovine sluggishness and submission were Miss Sanford's marked characteristics, for Miss Sanford was energy personified in petticoats. It had been moved, seconded and carried, in a spasm of feminine generosity, that the secretary and treasurer should be paid a salary, small, to be sure, but

something, and Priscilla Sanford, who had labored without fee or financial reward a dozen years, was permitted to hold the position as a salaried official just one year longer, by which time it was determined that Miss Sanford had really been secretary much too long, and, anyhow, that somebody else stood much more in need of it. So Priscilla's party found itself outvoted at the annual election, and the Young Woman's Church Aid ceased, except in name, to be a temperance union. With much that was intemperate in tone and language, the union burst its bonds and flew to pieces, one or more to each congregation. Then Priscilla tried her hand at writing for the various journals of the clerical order. Some few published, but none paid for, her contributions. Then Aunt Marion began sending occasional drafts that were not to be mentioned to anybody. Then came Priscilla's bid to join Uncle Will and Aunt Marion at Minneconjou, and then—Priscilla herself.

She had been there barely forty-eight hours when there arrived from the Philippines a bulky letter from Lieutenant Sandy Ray, eldest son and hope and heir, dated "Camp Lawton, Benguet." It had been nearly three months on the way. It brought tidings that made his mother's soft cheek pale with anxiety and caused Colonel Ray to look up startled as he read it, to go over and take his wife in his arms, lead her to the sofa, and hold her close as he went on with the final pages—a boy's rhapsody over a boy's first love:

MY OWN MUMMIE:—Not until I could send you the inclosed, the portrait, and by no means flattering one, of the loveliest girl that ever lived, could I write to tell you of my almost delirious happiness. But *look* at her—*look* at her, and see for yourself and rejoice with me, best, blessedest, dearest of mothers, that this exquisite creature loves me—*me*, your no 'count, ranch boy Sandy—loves *me*, and will soon, please God, be my own wife. Mother, mother, I have hardly slept in my wild joy, and now I can hardly wait for your approval and blessing. Dad will love and admire her, I know, but mothers, they say, never think any woman good enough for their boys, while I—I could kiss the very ground she treads so lightly. I almost worship the very glove she left me for a souvenir.

As yet I can't quite realize my wondrous luck. Why, Mummie, the other fellows were simply mad about her during her brief stay at Manila. Quite a lot of us, you know, were ordered there when poor Jack Bender was court-martialed. He got a stay of proceedings of some kind, so while the witnesses should have been back with General Young here, they were dancing attendance on her, and the way I got the inside track was, when her parents had to go over to Japan, I coaxed a ten days' leave out of the General and went with them—her father, mother and her own sweet self—on the *Hancock* to Nagasaki, and came back desolate on the—I don't know what.

I met her at a dance at the Club. She attracted me the instant I set eyes on her, so like is she to Maidie, only darker, perhaps, and taller, and a bit more slender. But her eyes, hair, teeth, coloring, are all *so* like Maidie's. Her features, perhaps, are more regular. Shannon, of the Twenty-third, was doing the devoted, and he presented me. She danced like a sylph, she danced right into my heart, Mummie, and there she lives and reigns and has her being—my queen! my queen!

Oh, what nonsense this must sound to you! All my wise resolutions as to young men marrying on lieutenant's pay thrown to the wind! That, however, need not worry us. The major, her father, is well-to-do, and she's an only child; but this is sordid. It is *she* that I love, and the man does not live who could see and know her and not worship. Why, even our old friend Captain Dwight was fascinated and did n't half like it that I should have gone with her to Nagasaki, and he was stiff as a ramrod when I came back. But to return to her father. He, of course, doesn't expect to remain in the army after the war. He was made major and quartermaster, I presume because of his financial experience and worth, and he was so patriotic he felt he had to get into the field as something. He is a Texan by long residence, if not birth; owns two or three ranches, and his wife, my darling's mother, is a Spanish lady whom he met years ago in Cuba, then *Señorita de la Cruz y Mendoza y Fronteras*, etc., etc., but she, my lady, never speaks of this. She is simplicity and sweetness itself. She bears her father's honored name, and that alone, except for her own Christian name, the sweetest ever—Inez.

The major's health has suffered much in Manila, but it is hoped that six weeks in Japan may restore him entirely. If not, they will take the homeward voyage by way of Vancouver in one of the fine ships of the Empress line instead of our crowded transports. Hundreds of State volunteers are going back by every one of these and, being discharged, or as good as discharged, they consider themselves relieved from all discipline—which makes it unpleasant for families of officers. They (the Farrells) may winter in 'Frisco, where I hope to join them in the spring, and where you will be sure to see them when you and Dad and the squadron embark for the Islands. There won't be anything left of the insurrection, or much of the insurrectos, at the rate things are going, by the time you come, but mean-

while, like the loving Mummie you are, write to them, especially to *her*, that your future daughter may know a loving welcome awaits her. She seems timid as to that and fears you may not like her, and Dad will, of course, write to Major Farrell, who is as keen a lover of horses as ever he was, and who owns some of the finest blooded stock ever seen in the South. This letter goes registered because of the priceless photograph, which was taken at Hong Kong, Inez tells me, just after their voyage over, when she was looking like a fright. Being registered, it must go slowly and may be long in reaching you, but fancy your Sandy's joy, if you can. Send this to Maidie, if you will, for I have no time to write to both. I am commanding my troop and we march at dawn for the mountains, and may be weeks now in the jungle, chasing Aguinaldo. Several of our fellows have broken down and had to go to the sea or back to Corregidor, even over to Japan, to recuperate, but I feel like a fighting cock and am going in now to win a name for myself, and for her, that you'll all be proud of. One thing I can tell you proudly, mother dear: never since that day at the Presidio, ever so much more than a year ago, have I let even a sip of wine pass my lips, the first and only teetotaler among the Rays, and perhaps *that* has something to do with my perfect physical trim. I owe you this, and have gladly kept the faith. Now in my new-found happiness I feel as if I could keep that and every other faith to the end. Lovingly, devotedly, your boy,

SANFORD RAY.

P. S.—Inez says it should not be announced until you all have approved, whereas I wished and would be for shouting the news from the housetops. There is a chance of getting this to you quicker than I thought. Captain Dwight has never been himself since Bender's trial and conviction. General Young wanted him to take sick leave last month and go to Japan, but he wouldn't. Now he's fairly broken down and has to be left

behind, so this will go to Manila with him. I wonder—I can't help wondering—what he'd think if he knew what was in it. The fellows do say she could have had him and his money, yet she chose your boy,

SANDY.

For a moment after reading the final page Colonel Ray sat in silence. Aloft could be heard the firm foot-falls of Miss Sanford as she bustled about her room unpacking her belated trunks. Within, with merry snap and sparkle, the fresh-heaped wood fire blazed in the broad open fireplace. Without, the orderly trumpeter, away over by the flagstaff, was winding the last note of stable call. The late afternoon sunshine flooded the valley of the Minneconjou. The mountain air, cool, bracing, redolent of pine and cedar, stirred the tracery of the white curtains at the open southward window and fluttered the silken folds of the standard and guidons at the parlor archway. Anxiously the mother heart was throbbing by his side, and the fond eyes sought the soldier's strong, storm-beaten face. Then she noted the look of bewilderment in his gaze, for again he was studying that postscript. Then suddenly he stretched forth his hand, took from the little pile of newspapers on a chair a copy of a recent army journal, swiftly turned over a page or two, searching the columns with half doubtful eyes; then, finding what he needed, thumbed the paragraph and held it where she could easily see. "Read that," said Ray, and Marion read aloud:

"SAN FRANCISCO, — 18.—Among the arrivals at the Occidental by the *Sheridan* from Manila and Nagasaki are Major, Mrs. and Miss Farrell and Captain Oswald M. Dwight, the latter of the —th Cavalry. Major Farrell, Quartermaster U. S. Volunteers, is the owner of valuable properties in Texas, whither he is soon to return. Captain Dwight, one of the most distinguished of our squadron leaders, is rapidly recuperating from serious illness contracted in the Philippines. The voyage proved a blessing in more ways than one, for the dinner given by Major and Mrs. Farrell last night, to a select coterie at the Bohemian Club, was to announce the engagement of their lovely daughter, Inez, to this gallant trooper, who won his spurs in the Apache campaign of the '80's, and the sympathy of hosts of friends on the Pacific coast in the death of his devoted wife six years ago. They will now rejoice with him in his joy, and unite with us in wishing him and his young and beautiful bride all possible felicity."

Mrs. Ray turned, all amaze, incredulity and distress; then, with something like a sob, buried her face on the sturdy blue shoulder. There was suspicious moisture about her husband's blinking eyes, and he for a moment could hardly trust himself to speak.

"Is it—*our* boy now, dear?" he gently asked, and her head came up at the instant, her blue eyes welling over with indignant tears:

"Oh, Will," she answered, "you know well what I'm thinking. It is of *her*—of Margaret—it is of *their* boy—poor little motherless Jim!"

CHAPTER II

A FACE FROM THE PHILIPPINES

THE man did not live who could say, much less think, that Oswald Dwight did not devotedly love his devoted wife and had not deeply, even desolately, mourned her untimely death. Margaret Weland was not a woman to be soon forgotten. For six years she had been the object almost of reverence among the officers and men of her husband's regiment, almost of worship among the women. Gentle, generous, and charitable, gifted with many a physical charm and almost every spiritual grace, she had lived her brief life in the army an uncrowned queen, and died a martyr—almost a saint. For long weeks afterward the women would weep at mere mention of her name. The casket that bore the fragile, lifeless form and that of her infant daughter to their final rest was literally buried in flowers that were wet with tears. Strong men, too, turned aside or hid their faces in trembling hands when with bowed head Oswald Dwight was led by, clasping to his breast his sobbing little boy. There were some who said that Dwight could never have pulled up again if it hadn't been for Jimmy. It was long months before the stricken soldier was restored to them. It was longer still before

little Jim returned, and every day meantime, after Dwight's appearance, regularly as he rose and went silently about his duties, the father wrote his letter to be read aloud to his only living child, and the one thing that spurred the merry-hearted little fellow to his studies was the longing to read and to answer for himself. Jim's first missive to his father, penned by his own infinite labor, was the event of the second winter at Fort Riley, for it was shown in succession to nearly every comrade and to every even remotely sympathetic woman at the post. There were maidens there who would fain have consoled the tall, distinguished, dark-eyed trooper, so interesting in his depth of melancholy, so eligible as a catch, for Dwight, for an army man, was oddly well to do. Obstinate, however, he refused all consolation from even such a sympathetic source, and would for long brook no companion on his solitary walks or rides. All his talk now was of his boy. All his thoughts, plans, projects, seemed centering on little Jim, who, for the time being, had to be housed among his mother's people. He was still too young for the care of a soldier-father who any day might be compelled to take the field. But then came station at Fort Riley, with its big garrison, its school and its society, and then the yearning at his heart could no longer be denied. The Wellands nearly cried their eyes out when Oswald, toward the end of the third "leave" since Margaret's death, told them that the time for which he had scrupulously sought to pre-

pare them had come at last: he must have his boy—he could not live without him.

Then when Jimmy came it seemed as though an entire garrison had started in to spoil him. He was the merriest, sunniest, friendliest little chap, frank, brave and even beautiful, with all his mother's lovely coloring, with her deep, heavily-lashed, soulful, violet eyes, with her soft curling brown hair, with her sweet, sensitive mouth and pretty white teeth. No wonder big Oswald used to set him on his knee and look long into the smiling little face, so fond and trustful, yet filled with vague wonderment why daddy should so wistfully gaze at him; and then with relief, Jim knew not why, when the strong arms would suddenly draw the lithe, slender little body to that broad and heaving chest and hold it there, close strained, while bearded lips sought and kissed again and again the sunny curls. Dwight just lived for that boy, said Fort Riley, small blame to him! Dwight made little Jim his friend, his confidant, his companion. Jim had his own little pony as soon as he could safely bestride one. Jim had his own little camp bed in the room opening off his father's. Jim had his own shower bath rigged up in his own closet. Jim had his regular setting-up drill and calisthenics, with daddy himself for teacher, his rub-down and his soldier toilet, with daddy to teach him breathing exercises that took the oxygen deep down into his lungs and sent the red blood whirling through his sinewy little frame. Jimmy had his own racket for

tennis, his own target rifle, his own kites, tops, marbles, soldiers of every conceivable size, costume and corps, his own railway tracks and trains, his own books and bookshelves, his own desk and study table—pretty much everything a boy could have except his own way, which he was the better without, and his own mother—without whom boy life can never be complete.

Fort Riley could be censorious, Heaven knows, when cause existed, and sometimes when it did n't; but, save the cherished thought of certain sentimental women that little Jim should have a mother's care as well as a father's, Fort Riley had few critics so unwise as to question Dwight's methods with his boy. Jim did not lack for playfellows of his own age—the fort was full of them and they as full of mischief and merriment as even army boys are apt to be; but, though at school and in the "all-round" sports of boyhood Jim mingled with them unreservedly, the father had made it his business to know most of them well before he brought Jim to take his initiation among them. There were some few whose homes Jim was cautioned not to visit. There were some whom, even on rainy days when the railway was in successful operation all over the second story, Jim was not permitted to invite to join his fellow-operatives. A few carping critics there were who thought such indulgence would be sure to spoil any boy, but, under his father's eye and guided by his father's hand, Jim worked and studied quite as steadily as he played. The staff of the

little army household was made up mainly of former trooper Hentzler and his buxom wife, Hentzler being butler, steward, and valet, Frau Hentzler cook and housemaid. Mrs. Feeny, of the troop, was their laundress, and Trooper Mehl "boots," striker and groom. But it was Dwight himself who roused his boy for his morning bath and exercise, who sat with him through his study hour, saw him off to school; walked, rode, drove, sometimes shot and fished with him, going for the purpose far up the Smoky Hill. It was Dwight who read with him after their evening tea and who finally knelt with him night after night before he tucked the little fellow into his white bed, imploring God's guidance for himself, God's blessing for his boy.

And so never again had they been separated, Dwight and his boy, until the squadron sailed for Manila and little Jim, refusing to be comforted, had been left with his mother's kindred until matters should shape themselves in the Philippines. But the shaping process that might have been a matter only of months, had the army found no other enemy than the insurgents and their climate, proved long and costly in life, limb, and treasure, thanks to the aid and comfort given that enemy by our fellow-men at home. Dwight had led his squadron through a campaign fierce in its occasional fighting, but well-nigh fatal through hardship and heat prostration to many besides himself. Dwight had had to turn over his command to Captain Gridley, his next in rank, and go to the

sea and Corregidor for rest and recuperation. What good effects might have been obtained were offset by the court-martial of an officer whose mind, it was believed, had been affected by sunstroke, yet Captain Dwight was compelled to appear and remain some time in Manila to testify against him. He returned to the field little benefited by the enforced separation from his fellows, and speedily showed symptoms of returning prostration that led the general commanding to order him again to the seashore and recommend his being sent on a sea voyage. It was during this voyage that, after four wonderful days at Nagasaki, he found himself daily, almost hourly, in the presence of Inez Farrell, as beautiful and graceful a girl as ever his eyes had seen. He was strong neither physically nor mentally. He was still an invalid when they met on the veranda of the old hotel overlooking that wonderful land-locked harbor. He had by no means forgotten the impression created by her beauty and her lissome grace when dancing at the club at Manila. He was invited by Major Farrell to be one of their little party on a rickshaw ride over the green hills to Mogi. It was an ideal day. It was an ideal night, with the moon nearing full as they sat later on the upper veranda, gazing out upon the riding lights of the shipping thick-clustered on the placid bosom of the bay. It was followed by other nights as beautiful both ashore and at sea. He was twenty years her senior, yet she seemed to look for him, wait for him, prefer him in every way to

younger officers, also homeward bound, and these youngsters left him to his fate.

What time he was not walking the deck, with her little hand resting on his arm, or flung in long, low steamer chair close to hers, where he could watch the wondrous beauty of her face and feel the spell of her soft, languorous, lovely eyes, Dwight found himself in converse with her father, a patriotic quartermaster, the owner of valuable properties in the Lone Star State, to which he must speedily return—his “boys,” two nephews, were not trained to business, said he, and they, too, had been seeing service and unsettling their minds and habits with the volunteers that didn’t get to Cuba. His daughter was his chief anxiety, he admitted. She had her mother’s luxurious Spanish temperament; needed a guiding hand—a husband to whom she could look up with respect and honor, not a callow youngster with no ideas beyond scheming for promotion and better pay. Several of these young chaps had been buzzing about her at Manila, but she had “turned them all down,” said Farrell. She had sense and power of observation with all her possibly romantic admiration for soldiers, but what she really admired was the real soldier—a man fit to command and lead, a man with a record behind him, not an uncertainty ahead. Dwight’s seat, at the request of the veteran general officer going with them to the States, had been at the captain’s table, but Dwight soon effected—at least Farrell effected and Dwight got

the *discredit* of it—a transfer with the officer who had been seated at the side of Inez Farrell, and Dwight's mental condition can perhaps be judged of by the fact that he never noticed that General Hume thereafter not once addressed him on the voyage.

Enough said. Oswald Dwight's many friends throughout the service read with much surprise, most of them with vague disquietude and some few with downright dismay, the announcement of the marriage at Los Angeles, by the Right Reverend the Bishop of the Diocese, assisted by the Very Reverend Fathers Moran and Finley, at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, of Inez, only daughter of Major and Quartermaster James O'Donohue Farrell, U. S. V., of Santa Rosita, Texas, and Maria Mercedes de la Cruz y Mendoza y Fronteras, his wife, to Captain Oswald M. Dwight, —th U. S. Cavalry.

When the happy pair set forth upon their wedding journey some comment was created by the fact that, while they went to New Orleans, the parents of the bride did not go to Texas, as had been planned. Moreover, the major, it seems, had not anticipated that orders honorably discharging him from the volunteer service would meet him within the week of his arrival within the Golden Gate. Officers of the Department Staff, interrogated on the subject, said little but looked volumes. Major Blake, of the Cavalry, an old and intimate friend of the Rays, was understood to say that it was a wonder

the major had been honorably discharged at all. Farrell, who was to have gone to his Texas property, found that certain mines in Mexico demanded immediate looking after. Indeed, it was this fact that precipitated an earlier marriage than Miss Farrell, whose trousseau was by no means in readiness, had for a moment contemplated. Farrell said he might be as much as six months in the mountains beyond Guadalajara and other places. The señora had, of course, wealthy kindred with whom she could stay at Mexico or Vera Cruz, but the hitch was about Inez, who, said her father, was so Americanized that she couldn't get along with her mother's people—they were forever at swords' points, and what more natural than that the ardent swain should promptly urge immediate union; then the Farrells could go their way in peace and he could bear away his beautiful bride to the Atlantic seaboard, to be made known to his people, and to embrace little Jim. To this Inez responded coyly that she could not think of such a plan. She could not go back to San Francisco, a bride, in the gowns she wore while there as Miss Farrell. Then said Dwight, we'll go straight to New Orleans, where her mother had many friends and kinsfolk, where the best of modistes abound, where everything a bride could possibly wear could surely be found, and Farrell added his dictum to the pleadings of the groom-elect. The plan appealed to him most, as it would cost him least.

When Farrell gave them his tearful benediction and

farewell, ten thousand dollars of Dwight's money was stowed away in bills of exchange on the City of Mexico for investment in the fabulous mines of the Sierras, and Dwight's signature was on the back of one or two bills left in the hands of Farrell's friends and correspondents at the Bank of California, purely, of course, for safe-keeping. And so they went on their respective ways, Farrell not soon to be seen in God's country again.

Three months later, with little Jim at his side and the young step-mother dawdling along after them in her easy carriage, Captain Dwight was tramping through Switzerland. The surgeons had said in so many words he must not return to the Philippines for half a year, and neither before nor after his marriage had a word reached him from the Rays, who were his next-door neighbors and Margaret's most devoted friends until Jimmy was nearly two years old. Even thereafter, though stationed far apart, Marion Ray and Margaret Dwight had kept up their correspondence almost to the end. Dwight, indeed, had seen barely half a dozen of his former comrades, and that only by accident and in haste. There had come since his second marriage the usual number of cards in response to the wedding announcement sent to so many friends both in and out of the army. There had come a curiously unusual dearth of letters of congratulation. But every man was on the move, he persuaded himself. Everybody was either busy in the Philippines or voyaging to or from them. They,

too, were moving from pillar to post, and letters must be miscarrying, so few, for instance, had come from Father-in-law Farrell, and those that did come made no mention of matters Farrell could hardly have ignored, and that Dwight had rather counted on.

Still, Dwight's health was mending every week. Inez had seen so much of foreign life in her younger days she could not be expected to care to go poking about, as he did with Jimmy, into all manner of odd nooks and corners. Father and son once more were hand in hand—hand in glove—for hours each day, and but for a shyness Jim would surely soon get over—a queer, silent shrinking from his beautiful young mother—but for this and one or two little worries due to the non-appearance of letters that ought to have come and doubtless would come, Dwight strove to persuade himself that he was again a happy and an enviable man.

Then came a day that left its impress on them all. There had been something very like demur on part of the Welland family when Dwight first announced his intention of taking Jimmy with them to see the Old World. What would Inez—they spoke her name with effort—think of such a plan? Was not a young bride justified in expecting the undivided attention of her husband? Would not any girl, placed as she was, prefer a honeymoon unclouded by the presence of the children of her predecessor? Inez had not warmed to her other kindred by marriage; could she be expected to welcome

and, all at once, to warm to little Jim? Conscientiously and consistently they had tried to like Inez, and could not. She was beautiful; she was appealing; she was apparently all desire to please, but she was not convincing. The more they saw of her the less they liked, but Dwight's infatuation was complete. And still he would have his boy, and they spoke at last. He had answered by summoning her to the room—a strange proceeding—and bidding her speak for him, and she did. She said her heart had yearned for little Jim ever since the captain first began to tell of him, and when she realized later how utterly the father's heart was bound up in his boy, she had prayed for guidance that she might prove a second mother to the little fellow, and it was her earnest desire that the lad might come with them. How else was she to hope to win his trust, his affection? There was nothing left for them to say; but the dread and desolation that fell upon the household when, for the second time, they were compelled to part with Margaret's boy, no one but the Wellands was permitted to know.

Inez, who had been a model sailor on the Pacific, kept much to her stateroom on the gray Atlantic, though the voyage was unusually placid. Nor had she later made much effort in her quest for Jimmy's trust and affection. She could not climb mountains, pedal wheels or ride quadrupeds. She cared little for scenery—she had seen so much in her girlhood. She admitted feeling

languid and inert. Perhaps mountain air was not congenial. She would be better when they got to sunny Italy. She wished there to see everything and to live in the open air—it was what the doctor said the captain must do—and then she was always exquisitely gowned and ready to meet them when in the late afternoon they came home, all aglow, with just time to get out of their tweeds and into dinner dress. Then Jimmy went early to bed, and she had the long beautiful evenings with her husband. But now they were in sunny Italy and, except to drive in beauteous toilets and dine in evening garb still more resplendent, Inez had no interest in her surroundings and but little in Jim. They were to sail for home, taking the *Hohenzollern* at Naples, after the Easter week in Rome. They had been driving much of the day and dining early on the balcony of their hotel, looking out upon the glorious view toward Sorrento and Capri, with grim Vesuvius, smoke-crowned, in the middle distance. Any moment, said their host, they should sight the graceful hull of their expected steamer cleaving the blue beyond the rocky scarp of Posilipo, when Jimmy, gazing steadily through the glass at the crowding fleet of shipping off the Dogana, spoke excitedly: “It is our flag, daddy, and the funnel has three stripes!”

“A transport,” said his father, who had been bending over Inez. “She must have come in while we were driving.” Yet, even as he spoke, anxiously, tenderly, he was studying her face.

"Then—that was one of our officers that spoke to you, mamma?" said Jim, turning quickly, eagerly toward her.

She had been unusually inert and silent since their return, had herself suggested dinner on the balcony. It would save the bother of dressing, and then repacking, since they might have to go on board any hour that evening. She had been gazing listlessly out over the beautiful bay, almost dazzling in the rays of the setting sun. Now she suddenly started, shivered, but almost as suddenly, quickly rallied.

"Spoke to *me*, Jimmy! Why, child, you've been dreaming!"

"Why, no, mamma! Don't you remember—while daddy was in at the bank?" and the boy's big violet eyes turned full upon her. The white hands gripped the arm of her reclining chair, but she laughed lightly, and the words came quick.

"Jimmy boy, you were sound asleep on the front seat. Don't you remember, Oswald, dear?"

Dwight, too, laughed merrily. "Surely! Why, little man, your peepers were shut and you were curled up like a pussy cat——"

"But I'd waked up, daddy. Mamma gave a little scream and I thought somebody 'd hurt her, and there was this gentleman with his hat raised, just standing and staring at her till she bent over and said something quick——"

“Well, of all the *tracumbilder* I ever heard!” and Mrs. Dwight’s pearly teeth gleamed through rosy lips as she laughed delightedly, merrily. “Why, Jimmy boy, I had to shake you awake when I saw papa coming. That’s what I bent forward for. You called him for something, dear, or I should n’t have disturbed him.”

“Certainly, I wanted him to see those Italian cavalry officers coming by, and his eyes could hardly open in time. Just look at ’em now.”

They were, indeed, worth looking at—big and violet, blue and round and full of wonderment, of incredulity—almost of shock and distress—gazing fixedly upon the lovely, laughing face of the girl in the deep reclining chair.

And then, soft stepping, apologetic, salver in hand, a waiter appeared at the long Venetian window. Dwight took the card, read, and fairly cried aloud:

“By all that’s jolly, Inez, it’s Sandy Ray!”

CHAPTER III

A NIGHT AT NAPLES

THERE was a joyous time at the Salone Margherita that evening. Homeward bound, the *Burnside*, from Manila to New York *via* Suez, had anchored that morning off the Dogana quay, and twoscore officers and ladies and a numerous contingent of discharged soldiers had come swarming ashore to see what they could of Naples before again proceeding on the morrow. The fact that most of the officers were invalided home, convalescing from wounds or severe illness, seemed but moderately to cloud their enjoyment. By six o'clock most of their number had heard that Dwight of the cavalry, with his bride, was at the Grand, whither several went at once before ordering dinner. First to arrive, alone, and looking pallid and ill, was a young soldier in civilian dress, who seemed nervously impatient at the delay that followed the sending up of his card, and by no means delighted when three or four of his fellows came in and followed suit before his own was acknowledged. So uncompanionable, indeed, was he that he stepped outside to the southward terrace as though to avoid these others, and, but for the cards, the observant *portier* might have thought them strangers to

each other. The late arrivals, as a rule, were garbed in khaki, just as they had come away from Manila, and were objects of polite curiosity to the elegantly capped, cloaked and uniformed Italian officers sauntering in from the Piazza Umberto, many of whom saluted courteously, though few could tell from the dress worn by the Americans which was officer and which was private soldier.

It was full fifteen minutes before Captain Dwight appeared, though little Jim had come bounding down the carpeted stairway all joy at seeing a face or two he well remembered, and in meeting new friends, who were unspeakably welcome because they were soldiers, American soldiers, *our* soldiers. Father, he said, would be down in a moment. Mamma was not quite well, over-tired, perhaps, from the long drive and day at sight-seeing and shopping. Even when Dwight appeared, shaking hands most cordially, rejoicingly, with all, and, indeed, nearly embracing Sandy Ray, whom he had known since that young gentleman's babyhood, it was a disappointment to all his visitors that he seemed worried and harassed. Mrs. Dwight, he explained, had not benefited as they had hoped by the journeyings abroad, and she had just had something like a sinking spell. They would have to excuse her a while. She'd be down later. "But you, too, Sandy boy! What a tough time you must have been having! I had n't heard of your being ill. I have n't heard anything, in fact. Your father has n't written to me at all. What has been the matter?"

And then it appeared that Sandy had been ailing for weeks on top of a not very serious wound, "was n't at all fit," yet did n't wish to come home—had been ordered out of the Islands, in fact. And then, as it further appeared, when Dwight turned, looking for little Jim, all eagerness that Sandy should see how splendidly the lad was grown and developed since their parting in Arizona years ago, when Jimmy was just beginning to toddle about and talk, there stood the boy, his big blue eyes fixed on the pallid, solemn face of Lieutenant Ray with a look of bewilderment and trouble. Fowne of the Engineers spoke of it later to Foster, who just at that moment had seized Jimmy and swung him to his shoulder, where, instead of gleefully pounding his captor's head and laughing merrily, as of old he would have done, Jimmy was straining his violet blue eyes again, staring after Ray, whom a waiter, bearing his card, had summoned to follow him. Three or four of the laughing party at the moment had surrounded Dwight, compelling him with their chatter, so that he stood with a hand still extended toward the spot where Jimmy had been standing, and did not even see that Ray had been summoned and was gone. Question and answer were flying thick and fast, for full five minutes before, looking about him, Dwight missed his boy. Foster, finding the little fellow unresponsive, at least, had presently set him down, and then, plunging eagerly into the talk over the latest newspaper tidings of the doings of the Islands—of Otis's prob-

able home-coming and MacArthur's succeeding to the command, of what could be looked for at Samar and Mindanao—he, too, had lost sight of the lad. "Hullo!" said Dwight, "Jimmy has taken possession of Ray. Well, that's as it should be. How was Gridley when you last saw him, Foster? And tell me about the Gillettes. They were mighty kind to me when I was so knocked out after Bender's trial. Fit now? I should say so! Never felt finer in my life. I'm going back to Manila just as soon as I can place my wife and Jimmy, no matter what the doctors say."

And so it happened that, for ten minutes or more, neither Lieutenant Ray nor little Jim was greatly missed. But then Dwight began bethinking him it was high time for Inez to appear. She had promised to come down and meet his old comrades. Only a few minutes would be needed, she declared, in which "to prink a bit." She had been looking so white, or yellow, rather—so wan and weak, yet, after a bumper of champagne, had rallied gallantly, had bidden him run down to meet them and keep them entertained. She'd soon be there. That was now full twenty minutes back, and these fellows were getting impatient for dinner. The head waiter was even now announcing that their table was in readiness. Excusing himself a moment, Dwight hastened from the salon and ran swiftly up to their apartments. She was not there. He went out upon the gallery—the last look by day over that incomparable panorama of earth and

sea and sky, for the sun was just kissing the far westward wave and throwing a glow of ruddy gold all over the Vesuvian shore. The waiter was clearing the table. Would the signor finish his wine? The signor needed none. Since that heat prostration in Luzon, Dwight found that a single glass would sometimes go to his head, and so when Inez was fatigued on land or ill at sea, and on her account he had ordered champagne, he merely sipped it, as it were, for her sake. There stood the generous flask still beaded with its icy dew, but most of its contents were gone. So was Inez. That waiter had then the proverbial "cheek" of his class—to drink half their wine and offer the signor the dregs. No, he wished no wine. Where was the signora? The signora, with the signorino, said the waiter, had been there but the moment before. The signora had reëntered her apartment as the signor ascended. Dwight tapped at her window, and presently her voice answered him, in apparent exasperation. She had been having "no end of bother" changing her gown. She could n't come down to meet his friends in the dusty traveling suit she had worn all day. She had hunted through two trunks before she found what she needed, and was so sorry for the delay, but she heard the party was to dine there. She had a maid to help her now, so she was trying to look her best and be worthy of him. Could he help in some way? Oh, dear no. Run back to them, there's a good boy, and in a few minutes she would be there.

So Dwight returned to the laughing party and went with them to their table and sat with them—an odd group in their service-worn suits of khaki amid the sumptuously attired guests in the brilliant room. Yet even among the wearers of the handsome Italian uniform the incessant glances toward the American party were far from critical. These men had but recently seen sharp service, and soldiers respect and envy soldier achievement. It was Dwight who first missed and asked for Ray. Ray? Why, Ray was n't of our party. Ray was n't of any party, in fact. Ray was "off his feed, if not off his base." The fellow was utterly hipped, said Foster. "No more like his father than I to Hercules, and nobody knows why." Ray came ashore with the rest of the crowd, had business at Cook's Bank, wandered off by himself and had been mooning by himself most of the voyage. Foster buried his muzzle deep in his brimming glass of Chianti and did n't care a billy what had become of young Ray. Gone back to the ship, probably, to sit and sulk the rest of the voyage. Obviously the quartette was out for pleasure, and Ray would have been a spoil-sport. None the less, Dwight felt that he should find him, if possible, and so went to the office. But assuredly, said the smiling, gold-banded official, the tenente departed as they were all in conversation. The tenente wished not to disturb them. The signorino went with him to his carriage and, behold! the signorino himself! Jimmy, indeed, came through the portal at the

moment from the Piazza Umberto side, but not the blithe, bounding, joyous Jimmy of the morning. The young face was clouded with a look the father never before had seen, and when he called and Jimmy suddenly turned and saw him, though the bright eyes lighted instantly with all the old love—perhaps, too, with some relief—the cloud did not entirely vanish, nor did the boy come bounding. He ran; he took his father's hand and looked up in his face, and when he was asked what he had done with Mr. Ray, said slowly: "Why, daddy, he is n't a bit like what I 'sposed he'd be. He only spoke to mamma a minute or two, and—I guess he is n't well. He did n't have time to speak to me—he hardly said good-by, or—anything."

"Oh, then mamma saw Mr. Ray! I'm glad of that," said Dwight, though remembering she had not mentioned it.

"Yes, on the gallery," said Jimmy. "At least, I suppose so. He came out through the corridor, and then mamma sent me after him with the gloves he had left. I wanted to ask him——" hesitated Jimmy. He did not know whether to go on or not, but he need not have worried. Papa had suddenly turned from him, turned to meet his new mamma—his beautiful young mamma, who, with bared neck and arms, in dinner toilet, was coming slowly and with trailing skirts down the broad and carpeted stairway and looking more radiant and beautiful than Jimmy ever before had seen her; she

whom, a few minutes earlier, he had found on the gallery pallid and excited, trembling from weakness, perhaps. Now she had diamonds in her ears and at her creamy throat, diamonds flashing in her corsage. There were shimmer and spangle and firefly sparklings in the lustrous folds of her gown. There were starlight twinklings from the bands of those wondrous, dainty, high-heeled little "slipper shoes," as Jimmy called them. There were glowworm gems in the dark masses of her luxuriant hair. There were rich and precious stones upon her slender, clasping fingers, for Dwight had been lavish to an extent he only now began to realize, for, though his heart leaped in unison with the instant admiration and worship in his eyes, it ached in strange, dull foreboding and reproach for the thought that instantly seized him: How utterly unlike Margaret!

A moment later and the men in khaki were being presented. They had sprung to their feet at sight of the radiant vision in the doorway, where for a moment Inez seemed to hesitate. Beautiful she was beyond question, with the rich, dusky beauty of the passionate South, and they who gazed upon her marveled not at the lover worship in Dwight's deep-set eyes—at the pride with which he watched her gracious, graceful, yet half-appealing and timid acknowledgment of their soldier homage. They made way for her, and would have it that she should sit with them as they lingered a few moments over their wine. And then Farnham, their senior pres-

ent, raised his glass to her with a word of soldier compliment and greeting, after the manner of the days of his forefathers, and they joined in the toast, one and all, and Inez blushed and beamed upon them, and looked up into her husband's eyes as though begging that he should speak for her, and sipped just the tiniest ripple from the brimming glass of champagne. They had not too much time, for boxes had been reserved for all their party at the Salone Margherita, and could not—would not Mrs. Dwight and the captain join them? Several of the ladies from the transport were to be with them, and now it would be incomplete without Mrs. Dwight. Again the deep, dark, lustrous eyes sought the husband's face, as though she would say in this, as in everything, he must decide. The transport was to proceed at dawn. The *Hohenzollern* could not be going earlier. How she *would* shine, this bird of paradise, among those simply-garbed army women who perforce were limited to such toilets as could be evolved from the little steamer trunks. It was Dwight who negatived the project. She would be utterly overdressed for the place and the occasion, but he based his regrets upon the long and fatiguing day, the packing that had to be done, the coming at any moment of their ship. Even now she was announced, said Jimmy, hastening in. And so the others went their way without the Dwights and joined their fellow-voyagers in their revel, the merriest group in all that laughing company, and only once or twice did someone, some

gentle-hearted woman, speak the thought that more than once or twice occurred to many present: Why should Sandy Ray have withdrawn from all companionship? Someone said he had returned to the steamer—alone.

It was long after midnight when they came rippling back to the huge bulk of the troopship, with silver raining from the blades of their oars into the sparkling bosom of that wondrous bay. A joyous little flotilla of Neapolitan water craft was theirs, for they had chartered several of the clumsy, unwieldy looking, yet most serviceable barklings, each with its dusky, brown-throated oarsman. They had spent some merry hours after the long, hot voyage through Indian seas and under torrid skies. They had heard much catchy music that all could appreciate and few words, fortunately, that any could understand. They were chatting and singing and recalling the brilliant scene, the dazzling lights, the lustrous corridor and stairway of pure white marble, the coaxing, wheedling swarm of beggar children, the sharp and ever-recurrent contrast between splendid opulence and squalid misery, and as they circled under the massive overhang of their stanch and trusty ship, and one after another each merry boatload came again in full view of the frowning cone of old Vesuvius, belching lurid flame and billowing ruddy streams of molten lava from its crest, some sweet-voiced woman in the foremost boat uplifted her heart in the barcarole from "Masaniello": "Behold how brightly breaks the morning," and, though morning

was yet some hours away, here but a league or two across the star-reflecting deep and under the shoulder of the mountain furnace lay the vine-covered walls of Portici, where first was trilled that exquisite welcome to Aurora. And so with music and merriment and laughter, homeward bound from distant service in defense of a beloved flag, they came trooping up the side, the opulence of their gladness all the sharper contrast to the dull apathy of one lone watcher who shrank from their approach and sought seclusion across the deck and in the shadow of the long boat.

Ray was not in his stateroom when Foster bustled thither to inquire. Ray had returned some hours before, said the ship's official on duty. Ray was not found, however, until nearly four bells, when Foster, who had smoked too much to feel sleepy and wished to "stay up and see Vesuvius, anyhow," made an extended inspection of the silent deck. Foster had taken it amiss that Ray should seem so downhearted and be so uncompanionable. Foster felt that the time had come when, in the absence of Sandy's own, he (Foster) should assume paternal rights, or at least those of elder brother, and take the youngster to task. Here and there about the big ship he found, in knots of two or three, silent or conversing in low tone, comrades of the commissioned list or of the ranks, unwilling to seek their berths so long as so gorgeous a panorama lasted. These were ranged along the starboard side, where best they could study

that superb sweep of shore line, of light and shadow, of slope and mountain, of curving strand—white, flashing in the moonbeams, of twinkling villages low-lying, of distant, rock-ribbed isles, but among these worshipers there was no Ray.

It was over on the other—the dark, the port—side, and all alone, sprawled in a steamer chair he had lugged to the upper deck and the shadow of the big boat, that Foster came upon the lad. His field glasses were in his hand; his eyes fixed dreamily upon the dwindling, diminishing night lights of the westward suburbs, and Foster hailed brusquely. It was time to jar the boy out of his mooning:

“Hello, Sandy! Where on earth have you been all night?”

“Nowhere,” was the short reply.

“Where on sea then, if you will be captious?”

“Oh, admiring scenery,” and Sandy yawned suggestively.

“Scenery is all on t’other side, man! Nothing here but ships and shore lights.”

“Well—that’s what I’m—looking at.”

Foster turned sulkily. He disliked being “stood off” by anybody, especially a youngster. Dimly in the soft moonlight the sleeping city lay outspread before him. Standing on the rail, grasping a stanchion, he could see, save where the charthouse and huge funnel interposed, the entire sweep from Posilipo at the west around almost

to Sorrento. Ray, seated under the shadow of the long boat, could see only from Posilipo to a low-lying cluster of lights almost at the water's edge. That then was the Piazza Umberto, and those few twinkling, starlike sparkles to the left, dancing so merrily on the intervening wave—those were from some still open casements at the Grand. Then Foster saw what Sandy Ray was looking for, and turned and left him.

At dawn they were weighing anchor, but the big ship had not yet swung her nose to the west when Foster again appeared on the dripping deck and again found Ray almost at the same spot. Some of the same lights, a very few, were still faintly to be seen to the west of the Piazza, and Ray's signal glasses were lifted to his eyes. Aloft the sentinel stars were paling, their night watch ended. Ashore, along the quays and basin and about the Dogana, the lantern lights told of the stir of coming day and departing shipping. Beyond the heavy smoke all about the lone and threatening mountain, the skies were taking on a rose hue of their own that dulled the glow of the sluggish streams rolling ever down those scarred and desolate slopes. Near by in silvery chime ship after ship announced the passing of the night hours, the birth of the infant day, and a long, light-girdled shape, floating easily close at hand on the swelling tide, slowly changed from shadowy black to gray, from gray to violet, and finally—as the still invisible sun peered long leagues away beyond the Italian

mountains, beyond the Adriatic wave, above the dim Ægean shore, and sent his flashing signals through the upper ether—from cream to snowy white, there lay the *Hohenzollern*, “all a taunto and impatient” for her westward voyage for “Gib,” for the Azores, for home, and they of the bulkier, heavier transport envied possibly the lithe and lissome build of the famous pleasure craft, once the pride of the old German Lloyds. She might follow in the run past Ischia and Sicily. She would lead far in the chase for Sandy Hook.

“Been up all night, Sandy?” hailed Foster sharply, believing it high time to break in upon these romantic moonings.

“No,” said the young soldier slowly. “I’ve been—down.”

“Poor boy,” thought Foster, as he turned away. “He looks it! Poor, nonsensical, damn little fool!”

Yet Foster was not so very big, so very wise, so very safe and sure. He had yet to know for himself much that Ray knew now.

CHAPTER IV

“SHE IS COMING HERE!”

THE valley of the Minneconjou was looking its loveliest in the joyous sunshine of mid-May. The post had been enlarged to meet the needs of the increasing garrison. A colonel of infantry had been sent to assume command, there being now two of his battalions at the station and only one squadron, of four troops, of Ray's old regiment, the —th Cavalry. At any moment our friend of that name and many years, now become lieutenant-colonel in his own right, could expect orders for the Philippines, and he was ready as ever, though there were just a few reasons why he hated to go. It had been decided that Marion, his wife, hitherto his almost inseparable companion, should not venture to Manila. The detail at most would not exceed two years. It might cover only one, for it was certain that, with the coming enlargement of the army, Ray would soon be promoted to the full rank of colonel, and that would probably bring him home again, for, as things had been going in Samar and Mindanao, colonels were in that sort of campaigning about as useful as most of them in church. Keen young captains and lieutenants were in demand. Field officers, so-

called, were of less account in the field than in fortified places. Occasionally a sizable column—a major's command perhaps—would push forth into the jungle, where it speedily had to split up into small detachments, probing in single file, and in pursuit of scattering bands of ladrones or banditti, the bamboo or the mountain trail. Moreover, much of the vim and spirit had been taken out of the soldiery, officers and men, old and young, by the fate of the more daring and energetic of their number, who had fallen victims, not to lance or bullet of lurking foe at the front, but rather “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” at the rear. A powerful party at home had shown far more concern over the alleged ill-treatment of the few insurgent bands than their actual treachery to our men-at-arms. Officers and men listened in silence to the public rebukes and sentences administered to the leaders who had shed their gloves and fought the insurrecto with weapons far more effective, yet infinitely less deadly, than fire and steel. Officers and men in silence set forth upon their next ordered expedition, and in silence returned and announced the result—practically nothing. Elusive and flitting little bands of native warriors, vanishing like shadows among the thickets, were not to be trapped by the methods prescribed for dealing with an army arrayed in front of Washington. “Don't come unless you have to,” wrote Major Blake from the hospital at Manila to Billy Ray at Minneconjou. “The courts-martial of Hill and Dale

and Langham have taken the heart out of our fellows. The young officers say they dare not go out for fear they might do some damage somewhere.”

So Ray, who had fought Indians all over the West for many a year—sometimes, it is true, coming in for a Puritanical scorching from press and pulpit in far New England, where, two hundred years ago, with prayerful zest our forefathers burned witches at the stake and put Pequots to the sword—now found himself shrinking from the task of tackling savages with gloves who treated men without mercy. Marion, as has been said, was not to accompany him to the Islands and be near to counsel and to comfort. She was not too well now, and had had many an anxiety. Billy, Junior, when he should have been studying for West Point, had been spooning over a pretty girl not yet in long dresses, and Sandy, their firstborn, the soldier boy, had come home from the Islands wounded in body and soul. The scar of the bullet would not be long healing, but the sting of that other shock and sorrow, who could say what that might yet import? for Sandy would not speak of it. Sandy would not so much as refer to his brief dream of bliss and the girl that inspired it. Sandy had come to them at Minneconjou to recuperate, detached from his own regiment “for such light duty as he might be able to perform” with his father’s squadron of the old —th. Sandy was a sad and silent man. “Let him alone to beat it out in time,” said the soldier-father. “It is the only way.”

But Marion's mother heart yearned over her boy and his wordless sorrowing. He must have loved that beautiful but unprincipled creature with all his fervent young heart.

Colonel Stone, who was now in command at Minneconjou, had known the Rays for years and was firmly their friend. Without so much as a hint from any source, he had divined that Sandy's low spirits were not the result of that bullet wound. He could not but note the solicitude with which his cavalry friend and offtime fellow-campaigner regarded the silent young soldier, his eldest son. Colonel Stone had suggested at first that Sandy be put at surveying the reservation—something to keep him long hours each day in the open air. But barely six months had elapsed since the Engineers, under orders from department headquarters, had completed with chain, rod and transit thorough plotting of the six mile square, to the end that a very finely finished map was received almost at the time the colonel first broached the subject. Sandy could not yet take part in the sharp mounted drills that were his father's delight. Something had to be done to give him measurably congenial occupation. He could not play tennis, croquet or billiards. He would not play poker or find solace in Scotch highballs. He might have derived some comfort from reading and study, but Priscilla was beset with desire to prescribe his reading and guide his studies, for Priscilla, being several years his senior in age and many volumes his superior in reading, was ever mindful of the mission

which no conscientious woman should be without. Priscilla had thought to start a school for the children of the garrison, but found that many of the elders were driven every day to town and its high school, while most of the mites were corraled each morning in the basement of the post chapel, pupils of a sergeant schoolmaster whose success had been quite remarkable, so much so that parents were reluctant—and their progeny rebellious—when other and more modern methods, Priscilla’s, were suggested. It must be owned that the little ones from the start found Miss Sanford unsympathetic, if not impossible. Children love being catechized as little as do their elders, and they resented it that this somewhat prim, yet by no means unprepossessing, spinster should consider it her duty and her privilege to cross-question them as to their infantile responsibilities and, all uninvited, to undertake supervision of their noisy sports. Finding no opening for a day school, Miss Sanford had sought to interest the weans in an afternoon reading class. The first day or two the major’s spacious quarters were well filled, so were the children with alluring goodies they could thoroughly appreciate. But when sermons began to take the place of sandwiches, and moral admonitions and questionings were administered in lieu of lemonade and lady-fingers, Miss Sanford’s kindergarten dissolved in air and the would-be gentle monitress in disappointed tears. Uncle Will had whimsically striven to console her with the promise of better luck

when school stopped in June, but Aunt Marion had smilingly though silently shaken her head. She knew Priscilla's propensities of old. She had convictions, said Aunt Marion, and theories as to how children should be taught to see the serious side of life. Priscilla was suffering from an accumulation of pent-up zeal and enthusiasm that was yet to find an outlet.

Then one day the outlet came.

Lieutenant Parker, "Exchange officer," so-called, was suddenly ordered to duty at West Point, and Colonel Stone asked Sandy Ray if he would take his place. "Strictly speaking," said he, "I should name one of my own officers, but I have other work for all of them, and lots of it. You have really very little else just now that you can do, except, perhaps, go to stables."

Now, if there was one institution more than another at Minneconjou against which Priscilla Sanford had set her seal, it was the post Exchange. In all her months of residence under Uncle Will's, the major's, roof, never once had the others there sheltered forgotten the day of her first acquaintance with the subject. Sandy was still beyond seas, but Billy, Junior, was of the household when, just as they took their place at table for luncheon, the husband and father spoke:

"Maidie wife, they have some capital cider at the Canteen and I ordered some sent over."

Miss Sanford looked up inquiringly over her poised spoonful of soup.

“The—Canteen?” she asked.

“Yes. The Post Exchange, it is called officially. It’s the post shop, restaurant, club, amusement hall, etc.,” answered the head of the house, while Marion, his wife, glanced just a trifle nervously at her niece.

“But why—Canteen? It is n’t, is it, a—bar?” And Miss Sanford’s tone betrayed the depth of her disapprobation of the name.

“Yes, and no,” said Uncle Will pleasantly, his dark eyes twinkling under their heavy brows and lashes. He rather liked to have ‘Cilla mount her successive hobbies, and thought it better, as a rule, to let her air her theories first in the sanctity of the family circle. “After experimenting a hundred years or so we found it wiser to prescribe the drinks as well as the meats of our men, and to provide a place for them at home where they can have rational amusement and refreshment, rather than send them out into the world where they get the worst of everything.”

“But, uncle, do you mean you let—you encourage—these young soldiers to—drink?” And the slender gold chain of Miss Sanford’s intellectual *pince nez* began to quiver, as did the lady’s sensitive nostrils.

“Encourage? No! Let? Yes, so long as it is nothing but sound beer or light wine—things we buy for them from the most reliable dealers and provide them practically at cost. You see they have their own club-room, and billiards, checkers, chess, dominoes, coffee,

cake and sandwiches. It keeps them here. It helps and contents them. They can't drink more than is good for them."

"Is it good for them that they should drink—at all?" demanded Priscilla.

"Possibly not. The ascetic in everything would be, physically perhaps, the ideal soldier. But precious few soldiers are ascetics, though many are total abstainers."

"Then why not all, since it is best for so many?"

"Because, 'Cilla, a large number refuse to be abstainers, and we can't make them. They won't enlist or serve if such conditions are imposed. If forbidden to use mild and carefully selected stimulant here they will go elsewhere and get the vilest the frontier can furnish, to the ruin of their stomachs, reputation and moral nature. We teach temperance—not intolerance."

But Priscilla had been reared in the shadow of the stanch old Calvinistic church and the strictest of schools.

"I—cannot see how you dare place such temptation in their way," said she. "You thereby take their souls in the hollow of your hand and become responsible—Oh!"—with a shudder of genuine distress and repugnance—"I knew—I had heard—there was drinking; but I never supposed it was countenanced, *encouraged* by—by those who ought to be their shield against such temptation and trouble." And here Priscilla's words were oddly reminiscent of the editorial columns of the *Banner*

of *Light* and certain other most excellent organs of the Prohibition element.

"We do it to keep them from vastly worse temptation and trouble, Priscilla," said the veteran soldier kindly, and signaling Marion not to interpose. "You are right, dear, in the abstract, but we have to deal with men as we find them. We would be glad indeed of ideals, but the ideal does n't, as a rule, enlist."

"The Bible teaches us it stingeth like an adder," said Priscilla solemnly, with suggestive glance at Billy, Junior, whom she but yesterday had rebuked for sipping claret at the colonel's dinner.

"The Bible also tells us Who turned water into wine at a certain marriage feast," said Uncle Will, his mustache twitching.

Whereat Priscilla flushed; the tears started to her eyes; she arose and left the table, her soup unfinished. It was one thing to quote the Scriptures in support of her views; it was quite another to array them on the other side. When Aunt Marion went to Priscilla's room a little later, with a tray of tea and comfits and a word of gentle expostulation, she found her niece in anything but melting mood. To Priscilla's mind such argument as Uncle Will's was impious. To Aunt Marion's suggestion that at least it was from like authority with her own, Priscilla could find no better reply than "That's different."

Down in her heart of hearts Priscilla thought it a grave mistake on part of somebody that the episode of

the marriage of Cana of Galilee had any place in Holy Writ. Indeed it may be hazarded that, long schooled by the *Banner* and the eloquent lessons of her favorite preachers, Priscilla could have listened with becoming modesty, but no surprise, had it been suggested that she undertake the preparation of an expurgated edition of the Word.

At the date of this initial clash Uncle Will was still commanding the post. Stone, with the Sixty-first, came later. Priscilla, finding her uncle ever smilingly tolerant of her views, but never shaken in his own, had first essayed an inspection of the Canteen—she would not call it the Exchange—and then had descended upon the chaplain—a gentle divine, gifted with much faith but little force, a kindly, sweet-tempered cleric ever ready to follow if never to lead in good work that demanded personal push and energy. Priscilla had spent sleepless hours in thought over the situation. She could not abolish the Canteen since the law (“The law *and* the prophets,” said Uncle Will, though Priscilla would not hear) sustained it. She could, she reasoned, conduct a rival establishment that should wean the soldier from the false faith to the true, and to this end she sought the aid of the cassock.

Uncle Will had taken her, at her request, to see the objectionable institution, and she had peered curiously about the cozy interior. At sight of their much honored squadron leader, the few troopers at the tables, busy

with checkers, dominoes or billiards, had sprung to attention, facing him and the grave-eyed lady by his side, and there stood in soldierly respect. Ray smilingly acknowledged their homage, bade them go on with their games; he merely wished his niece from the East “to see how we manage to live in the West.” Then he showed her the bookshelves and the reading room with its illustrated weeklies and magazines, the well-furnished writing tables whereat certain young soldiers were working at their letters home; the refreshment counter, with its appetizing little stack of sandwiches and polished urn of steaming coffee, and all this Priscilla saw without sign of surrender. What she looked for she did not find—symptoms of the inevitable intoxication and debauchery to be expected wherever liquor was sold or used. Some of the men had half-emptied beer glasses at their elbow. Two German non-commissioned officers were sipping appreciatively the wine of their native Rhineland as they chatted in quiet comfort over their little table at the window. A veteran sergeant stepped forward and begged the honor of tendering the colonel and the lady a glass of their wine, and again every man was on his feet as Ray drank to their health, and Priscilla thanked their entertainers and said she would be glad of a little coffee—she never used wine. She was silent as she came away—all was so orderly, so cheery; the men seemed so content with their surroundings, so pleased that “the colonel” (never did they forget his

volunteer title) should come to see them. She owned that—yes—they looked very—decent *now*, but—but, it was only the first step; it was what it all *led* to, said she, that made it so dangerous, so dreadful! Indeed, the mere fact that all was so well ordered made it, presumably, to Priscilla's mind, all the more alluring and terrible. It was the devil's way always, she had been taught—imperceptible, inviting, insidious. Priscilla prayed long that night and pondered. She had almost decided on a campaign of conquest and overthrow, when the new commander came, and in Colonel Stone she found an obstacle quite as firm as Uncle Will—and far less tolerant.

Meantime, however, Priscilla had organized her "Soldiers' Advancement Association"; had started in a vacant set of quarters a rival to the Canteen, where even better coffee and sandwiches could be had and much more improving conversation, but no beer, and Priscilla was presently in the seventh heaven; so many soldiers came she had to send for more seats and more supplies. Every evening after dinner, putting behind her the unworthy, if worldly, impulse to go and join in the music or the dance, Priscilla met her martial friends and pupils, learned their soldier names, something of their history and much of their needs. The chaplain at first was quite assiduous in his attendance, but the chaplain, she speedily decided, was slow, prosy, unconvincing. He did not seem to *stir* them as they should be stirred, and when one

night the kindly old gentleman failed to come, and his goodwife sent word she feared her husband had caught a heavy cold, Priscilla took the Word, as the French would say; read the chapter of her choice; expounded vehemently after the manner of her favorite exhorters, and came home radiant. No less than six of the men had come to her to thank her for her soul-stirring words, and to say that if they had had such teaching as that in their past they would never have brought sorrow to a mother's heart, as some of them feared they had. Uncle Will's eyebrows went up significantly when Priscilla named her converts, and once or twice, as he sat writing to Blake that night in his little den, sounds as of irrepressible chuckling came from that sanctum, and Marion slipped in to say a word of caution. Priscilla, however, at last had found her opportunity and could not be laughed out of it. The chaplain was warned, he said, that exposure to the wintry night air was hazardous, and he was reluctantly compelled to withdraw, and Priscilla, by no means reluctantly, to part with him. She was in desperate earnest and in the full tide of apparent success, with all Minneconjou watching with absorbed if mischievous interest. Priscilla's mourners' bench, it must be owned, was graced by the presence of one or two veteran troopers, the mention of whose names was enough to start the risibilities of that godless array, “the Mess.” There was Shaughnessy, who had served six enlistments and never kept the chevrons six months at a

time. There was Kelly, the "champeen thrumpether," who could blow "Taps" that would bring tears to your eyes one day and maledictions on his head the next. There was Costigan, who had been "bobtailed" out of two of the best regiments of infantry of the service, and only "taken on" in Ray's old troop by special permission, because of his undeniable valor in Indian campaign and the fact that when he let whisky alone there was not a neater, nattier soldier, Horse, Foot or Dragoon, to be found in the field. Priscilla had indeed gathered in some of the reprobates, and sought to reach more. She begged that, in accordance with their plaintive request, the inmates of the guard-house, immortal "Company Q," might be allowed the benefit and privileges of the Association. Had not He said He came not to call the just but the sinners to repentance? and, as Uncle Will whimsically remarked, "If what Priscilla wants are sinners—she's got 'em."

And this was the state of things when Stone arrived; took command, reinforced the garrison with eight stout companies and band of the Sixty-first, and the guard-house with a score of military malefactors who, hearing of Miss Sanford's Soldiers' Advancement Association, begged leave to partake of its blessings, including the coffee and sandwiches. Then Stone suddenly "tumbled to the scheme," as Billy, Junior, a fierce skeptic from the start, described it. Then Stone himself attended a meeting, to the obvious embarrassment of the congregation,

though Priscilla beamed upon him in the sudden belief that here indeed was a heart worth the moving. What Stone saw was quite enough to convince him of the utter absurdity of permitting the further attendance of, at least, the guard-house contingent, but he would not wound Priscilla or, without abundant reason, disturb the edifice builded under Ray's administration. The Association might even have lived and thrived another week on Priscilla's ministrations—and at Ray's expense—for daily coffee and sandwiches for all comers, forty odd, at least, was proving costly. It was “Company Q” itself that broke it up. The privilege and the darkness combined enabled certain of its unhallowed spirits to smuggle whisky into the prison room, and, thus stimulated, a gifted ex-professional of the “dramatic line” set up a wonderfully if wickedly witty burlesque of the evening's lecture, to the irrepressible, and presently uproarious, mirth of his fellow-jailbirds. It was just what Stone was expecting, and so far from ordering it stopped, he sent for Ray and bade him listen. Then the post and the squadron commander shook hands in silence. “You see for yourself,” said Stone. “I, too, have been expecting it,” said Ray. Then the guard was sent in. The impious revel was suddenly and summarily squelched. Then Ray gently told Priscilla the sinners could come no more, but mercifully would not tell her much, at least, that he had heard. So the Soldiers' Advancement Association retrograded in numbers to less than half, and then, as others

not at the moment under guard took alarm, to less than a dozen. But Priscilla wrapped herself up in the nine that were left, and, as all barrack room was now needed, for these they fitted up a little apartment in the basement of the major's quarters, and then came Sandy Ray, as has been said, and spring was turning to summer, and Priscilla's band of stalwarts had been reduced to six, and of these six the apple of her spiritual eye was Blenke.

One of the recruits, regimental and bibli-classical, was Blenke, but already a marked man. Small of stature, lithe, slender and sinewy, with dainty little hands and feet, with pallid face and regular features and great big, mournful brown eyes that looked pleadingly into those of his superiors, Blenke wore the uniform of a private with the ease and grace and care of a dandy subaltern. Blenke's gloves and shoes could not be furnished by the quartermaster's department; they did not deal in such small sizes; but Blenke brought with him all he could need of such items for months to come. Blenke was a silent fellow in barracks. Blenke never whistled or sang. Blenke rarely spoke and never smiled. It was not that Blenke's face was set in gloom, but an air of gentle melancholy hung ever about him. He made no intimates, sought no confidences and gave none among the men. Whatever he was put to do he did surprisingly well. Corporal Donovan, detailed to drill him when he, with the rest of the little party, arrived, informed the first sergeant that "that young feller knew more settin'-

up drill than any non-com at the post.” So it proved also with the manual of arms. Blenke was an expert. When put into a squad for aiming and position drill, Blenke had nothing to learn, and his shooting and gallery practice was on a par with the best. They sent him out to the rifle range west of the post and there he “qualified” at known distance and excelled at the silhouettes, and still he declared he had never before “taken a blanket” He learned his drill and shooting with the militia, he said; gave “clerk” as his occupation and wrote a beautiful hand, though his spelling at times might be criticised. Blenke had a watch, card-case, shirts, shoes and underwear that told of better days. Blenke, apparently, had no vices. He neither drank, smoked, chewed, gambled nor, unless closely pressed as to his past, was he believed to lie. Blenke looked about him a bit before going either to church or town. Then Blenke began appearing regularly at chapel service, and then, modestly, sought permission to enter Miss Sanford’s Soldiers’ Advancement Association, where speedily he attracted the especial notice of that devoted and devotional young woman. Then Blenke offered his services as writer, copyist, etc., and Priscilla, being much occupied, gladly installed him at a desk whereat he spent much time when not elsewhere on duty, and all the while, neat, handy, silent, unobtrusive, yet seeing everything with those deep, mournful, watchful eyes, Blenke found means to make himself more and more useful, and pres-

ently to communicate the fact that though his present lot was humble there had been "advantages" in the past, there were ambitions for the future. To begin with, he wished to transfer into the cavalry. He knew little, he said, of the relative merits of those arms before enlisting. He had seen much since, he said, to convince him that for a young man of spirit the cavalry offered opportunities not to be looked for in the infantry. This, he judged, would not displease the squadron commander, whose influence through Miss Sanford he earnestly sought, and so it resulted that Blenke, little by little, was far more frequently to be found about the major's quarters than his own.

Ray did not like it. Neither did Blenke's captain, yet neither wished to throw cold water on Priscilla's efforts, and really nothing could be less obtrusive or more precise and soldierly than Blenke. He never presumed to speak except in answer to questions. He was scrupulous in dress, bearing, conduct and military courtesy. His salute was precision itself. His captain really wished to make him a corporal, but a veteran first sergeant respectfully protested. "The men would n't stand for it, sir, and him not two months in the company." Sandy Ray, who came home in mood to carp at anything, liked it least of all that he should be forever encountering Blenke about the lower floor or around the walks and quarters. But Priscilla was forever talking of Blenke's helpfulness, his piety, high character, and his modest

hopes. Blenke was beginning to talk with her about studying for a commission. Blenke was beginning to be disliked among the men because he ignored them so.

Then one day came the expected. Lieutenant-Colonel Ray, —th Cavalry, was ordered to proceed at once to San Francisco, and thence by transport to Manila. Then came tidings of deaths in the Islands, and retirements at home, and, six months sooner than he had hoped for such a thing, Oswald Dwight saw the gold leaves of a major dangling before his mental vision, and the night before Colonel Ray was to bid his loved ones good-by and take train for the coast, and he and Marion, arm in arm, were coming home from some parting calls, they saw Blenke standing at their gate, a telegraphic message in his hand; Priscilla and Billy, Junior, following, closed upon the elders as Ray tore open the envelope. Blenke, having delivered it, stood scrupulously at attention just beyond the gate, gazing with his mournful eyes straight out at the flagstaff in the middle of the parade. Ray read, turned a bit pale, and glanced hurriedly about him as though in search of someone. Sandy was not in sight. He was busy with the affairs of the Canteen.

“What is it, Will?” asked Marion anxiously, her gloved hand trembling a bit upon his arm.

“Of all things—queer,” said Ray. “Dwight gets my squadron, and—*she’s* coming with him.”

Then unaccountably Private Blenke’s forage-cap, always worn well forward, tilted off and fell at his feet.

CHAPTER V

PREMONITORY SYMPTOMS

COLONEL RAY was no coward, but it must be owned that he was glad to be well away from Minneconjou before the coming of the Dwights. What troubled him most was, not how Sandy, his eldest boy, but how Marion, his beloved wife, might suffer. Never to either father or mother had the young officer spoken the name of the second Mrs. Dwight. Never since his coming to Minneconjou had he referred to his infatuation of the previous year, nor had he even remotely mentioned the meeting at Naples. They knew of it, of course. There were so many aboard the transport who had heard all there was to hear about it, and some of these many could not be expected to keep it to themselves. Sandy, indeed, reached the post only a day or two in advance of this interesting piece of news. Marion heard it before her husband and refrained from telling him, in hopes that Sandy himself would open his heart and tell her all there was to be told; but presently it dawned upon her that the boy shrank from the very mention of "that woman's" name—then that Will, too, had heard the story, and not from Sandy, and then that each feared to tell the other. Then as of old, she nestled into her husband's arms, and there, in her refuge, said:

"After all, Will, is n't it better he should have seen her and—had done with it?"

"If only he has done with it," thought the colonel, as he watched the young soldier going doggedly about his duties. "If only he *has* done with it!" he thought again, when he saw the red burning on the young fellow's cheek that told he knew at last of the impending arrival. But the boy had shown splendid nerve and grit in that vital matter of the gradual repayment of the moneys lost through his neglect at the Presidio in '98. He had shown such manliness in abjuring wine after that one almost excusable lapse so long ago. A boy who could keep himself so thoroughly in hand, said the colonel, in two cardinal points, can be counted on to keep his head even when he may have lost his heart. No. Ray had trusted Sandy thoroughly in the past, and Sandy had thoroughly justified it. Ray meant as thoroughly to trust now to the manfulness and honor of his son. Pride, too, would help the lad even were "that woman" to seek to lure him again.

But it was hard to leave Marion to meet the Dwights. In all her army life, with the possible exception of Grace Truscott, never had Marion met a woman for whom she felt such depth of affection and regard as for Margaret Dwight. The two, as has been said, were devoted friends, and when Margaret died, leaving her husband, crushed and heartbroken, and that idol of her heart, little Jim, it is doubtful if among her own people she was mourned

as utterly as she was by Mrs. Ray. In the years that followed Marion was forever planning for the little fellow's future, and pouring forth a perfect flood of sympathy for that bereaved soldier, his father. It came as a shock inexpressible that Oswald Dwight, after six years' brooding, had married again, and had given Margaret's place to—what?—a girl, young, beautiful, obscure, unprincipled—the girl whom her own Sandy had rapturously loved and implicitly believed in. And now Marion was called upon to meet this woman in “the fierce white light that beats upon” garrison life—see her daily, hourly, possibly as a next-door neighbor, and no husband's arm or counsel to lean upon.

Nor was this all. It had been arranged that the families of officers ordered on foreign service should retain quarters at the station from which said officers took their departure, provided the quarters were not actually needed by the garrison. Three out of five the big army posts had been left with but a detachment to guard them. Minneconjou was an exception. Hither had come Stone, with two battalions of Foot. Headquarters, staff, band and one squadron of the cavalry had been there, but band and headquarters were now shifted to Niobrara. How Marion wished the squadron could have gone, too! But that was not to be. There were still the four troops at the station, and the Rays were still quartered in the big, roomy house to the right of the post commander's—Marion, her sons, her niece and their two servants.

There was even abundant space for her niece's diminishing Advancement Association—the secretary's desk and the mournful-eyed young secretary being much in evidence at the basement window on the north side. Three sets, the colonel's and the flanking field officers', had been built with high piazzas and well-lighted basements beneath; all the others were squat on the hard prairie ground. Stone had two majors with him, both junior to Ray and the post surgeon, so they had taken root in the lines and, for army men, were quite content. All on a sudden one day the new major, Dwight, drove out from the railway station in town, reported with soldierly precision to Colonel Stone, and accepted the promptly tendered invitation to be the colonel's guest until ready to occupy his own quarters. Dwight came earlier than had been expected; explained that he "came ahead to select quarters," would send Mrs. Dwight the measurements of the rooms, then ask for a week's leave to return and fetch her with their goods, carpets and variegated chattels from Chicago. Had any letters or dispatches been received for him? None? Dwight looked queer and grave. Indeed, Stone, who had heard much of him and had met him once or twice in bygone days, confessed to his wife that Dwight must have "gone off" not a little in more ways than one. Was it the old sorrow or—the new wife—or, mayhap, the sunstroke in the Pampangas?

That afternoon Marion Ray, seated on the vine-shaded

piazza, writing to her husband, looked up suddenly at sound of a footstep and, startled and for a moment speechless, gazed into the once familiar features of Margaret Dwight's once devoted husband. She was slow to rise and hold forth her hand, so strange was the expression in his tired eyes. When she could speak it was to say, though her heart fluttered, "Welcome again, Major Dwight, but I'm so sorry Will is not here, too! It is barely a week since he started."

"I have hurried," was the answer, as he took her hand. "I am so tired of leave, of dawdling, of—almost everything. I'm wild to get to work—to *work* again, Mrs. Ray! That's what a man must have."

All the old strength and repose of manner had gone. She was shocked and troubled at the change, and hurried on in her words lest he should see it.

"And how is my boy—our little Jim? And—I hope Mrs. Dwight is well, and—we're to see her soon," she ventured.

"Mrs. Dwight is looking remarkably well, though she and I are anxious about her mother. Indeed, I had hoped to find dispatches—or something—here from Major Farrell," and surely Dwight's face betrayed rather more than his words. "Jimmy's in fine trim," he hurried on. "They got to be fast friends voyaging. They were up on deck all the homeward way, whereas I'm a very poor sailor. I could hardly hold up my head from the time we left Gibraltar."

"I'm glad of that—friendship," said Marion gravely, guardedly, for already, in the friendship Minneconjou had been hearing of, little Jim was not included. The *Hohenzollern*, after a stop-over at Algiers, had been boarded at Gibraltar by two crestfallen gentlemen in khaki and a quandary. The transport had preceded the liner into the shadow of the sleeping lion just thirty hours, and, steaming on to sea before the latter was signaled, found some hours out that Foster and Gibson had been unaccountably left behind. At their own expense, their soldier wardrobe and toilet replenished by a score of jovial Britons who had also contributed to their detention, these two warriors completed their voyage, and Gibson said he was practically alone, for, from morn till nearly midnight, from off Cadiz until held up at quarantine, Foster had been dancing attendance on the lovely Mrs. Dwight, the captain being much of the time down with *mal de mer*.

Now, Sandy had merely referred to "two fellows left at 'Gib,'" without going into particulars. Sandy, of course, could not be expected to know what might have transpired on the *Hohenzollern*. Sandy had said nothing about the Dwights at Naples. Sandy had not mentioned even Jimmy, and so long as he shrank from the subject the mother wisely would not question. She was glad now that Sandy was not at home, that he was busy with his accounts over at the Exchange. She was glad that Priscilla was not within earshot, that she was busy with

her Bible class on the floor below. Priscilla, Aunt Marion owned, was inquisitive at times, and her theory of a mission among men was not limited to the rank and file. Priscilla had ambitions embracing the moral improvement of every officer from "C. O. to sub.," and Priscilla had heard things somewhere about the post that set her to asking all manner of questions of her aunt, questions that set the mother heart to fluttering lest Priscilla next might direct her batteries on Sandy. No good could come from that, she knew, for one of Sandy's earliest antipathies had been Cousin 'Cil, whom he called a preacher in petticoats. Sandy was civil to her now, but by no means inviting, and Priscilla took it much amiss that her cousin rather held aloof, refused to argue the canteen question with her, and could not be drawn into doctrinal discussion of any kind.

Below stairs could be heard the low hum of voices through the open casement. Priscilla had been reading aloud to her soldier wards, but police and stable call would presently be sounding—the signal that, save the secretary, would take away her pupils, and Aunt Marion hoped Priscilla might not appear upon the scene before Dwight departed, yet longed to hear him tell of little Jim, and Dwight seemed intent only on telling her of Inez—Inez and her perfections. Dwight seemed to feel that he must make this devoted friend of his first wife fully aware of the manifold perfections of the second. To all she listened with such attention as she could com-

mand, but when again she asked for Jim and whether he was greatly grown and whether he was studious,—or what,—for well she remembered all Margaret's cherished plans for her boy, again Dwight responded with what Inez said and Inez thought. Inez so loved him. Inez so delighted in having him with her in her walks and rides. Inez thought him so keen, so quick, so intelligent. Inez admired his eyes, his face, his slender boyish beauty. Inez could not say enough in praise of him. It was Inez this and Inez that. There would only be three of them, said he, when they came to Minneconjou,—Inez, Jim and himself. They would have no use, said he, for the big house occupied by the Rays. He really preferred one of the sets of captain's quarters. Marion had been wondering whether Inez would not prefer to occupy these—whether, in fine, they would not have to move out and give the Dwights possession, but Dwight said no. In fact, he would not decide what set to take, now that he had seen them, until Inez herself arrived; whereat Mrs. Ray breathed freer.

And then the bugles blared across the broad parade and the white stable frocks began to dot the distant and severe façade of the frontier barracks, and 'Cilla's pupils came forth and hastened to their duties, and, catching sight of Colonel Stone and certain of his officers wending their way to the club, Dwight took his leave and started for the steps. He would see Mrs. Ray again within a day, he said. He was eager to see Sandy, who,

somehow, had not seemed himself when they met at Naples. And then Priscilla's even tones were heard below, and the low-pitched, murmurous voice of the deferential secretary, and Marion would have detained the major, she hardly knew why, but he was nervously saying adieu and hurriedly descending the steps just as Miss Sanford and her assistant issued from beneath. At sight of the strange officer Priscilla's glasses went up for deliberate survey, the secretary's hand in quick salute. At sound of his name, as Mrs. Ray spoke a word in parting, Miss Sanford's face beamed with instant interest, the secretary's paled with as instant emotion. Standing in the slant of the afternoon sunshine, where Mrs. Ray could not but distinctly see him, Private Blenke had turned yellow-white as unbleached cotton and was biting his lips to control their twitching. Then, without a word, the moment Dwight went his way, Blenke faced about and bolted another.

Miss Sanford followed the major with curious eyes, then turned to resume certain instructions to her satellite, and behold, he was scurrying away across the parade in pursuit of the earlier departures. "Why, I—had n't half finished," said she, as she turned to her aunt. "What took him off in such a hurry?"

There was none to answer, however, for Mrs. Ray had turned back to her letters; and on the following day Dwight hastened to Chicago. Within the week came Colonel Stone, with a face eloquent of perplexity.

"Mrs. Ray," said he, "this is simply unaccountable, but Major Dwight writes me that, after all, he shall have to claim the privilege of his rank and—this set of quarters. It seems that Mrs. Dwight is now expecting her mother and others to pay her an extended visit as soon as she is settled, and captain's quarters would not be large enough."

Which was how it happened that, two days later, the goods and chattels of the Rays were being stowed in another and much smaller tenement some distance down the line. There was a very good set—a really roomier set—that Priscilla much preferred only two doors away from that which they were vacating, but Aunt Marion would have none of it. She had made neither comment nor remonstrance when Stone came in with his unwelcome news. She would say nothing about it now. That she should retain the quarters of a field officer was something to be accorded as a courtesy; it could not be demanded as a right, save at certain large posts with small garrisons. But men and women who knew Marion Ray, and they who knew her honored her, felt confident of one thing, that she was intent on getting as far away from the coming household as lay in her power to do. Sandy was but a second lieutenant still and entitled by law to only one room and a kitchen. They were in luck, perhaps, in finding so good and new and commodious a set of quarters as these to which they were assigned.

Sandy had not opened his head on the subject of

Major and Mrs. Dwight, even when, at their instance, he, his mother and their household had been dispossessed. Sandy had found an easy horse and, with the consent of the surgeon, had begun to spend some hours in saddle again when not at the "shop." Then Priscilla, believing lonely brooding to be a bad thing for any man, found means to a mount and surprised him one day by appearing in habit and saddle ready to ride. For the life of him Sandy could not look pleased at the prospect. Five years earlier, when Priscilla was well-to-do, he might have found excuse to avoid or to leave her. Now, in the days of her dependence, he could and would not; but he proved a silent companion.

Across the fords and just at the eastern edge of the reservation they passed on their return some ramshackle buildings, only two of which showed signs of recent human occupation, and Priscilla spoke of their abandoned look and then—wished she had refrained.

"Time was," said Sandy, "when they were bustling and lively enough. We had no Exchange then, and the men wandered out here for their beer, and here parted with their money and their hopes. Here they were drugged till their last cent was wheedled or bullied out of them. Then they were kicked out in the cold to take their punishment at the fort. Then it was our *men* that went to ruin. Now, as you see, it is only the ranch."

It was useless arguing with people so narrow-minded as her cousins, thought poor 'Cilla, as she sharply touched

her broncho with the lash and drove him hock deep through the foaming waters. What all men should see was that alcohol in any form was an enemy to be shunned and set aside, a thing never to be tampered with or tolerated, and here were sane and, in many ways, excellent people—people who had been to her most loving and kind and charitable—who were willing to concede that what she said might all be true, but were equally convinced that what she would do was utterly impracticable—people who themselves eschewed the use of wine, yet blindly persisted in providing it for these children of the nation, the soldiers, because, as they said, most of the soldiers could not be made to see the harm in malt or mild wine and would drink vilest whisky if deprived of them. She considered Sandy a scoffer, whereas Sandy did not scoff at all. He simply cited facts. She longed for opportunity to convert him to her views and believed implicitly that if he could but be made to listen he would surely see the light, but whenever Cilla brought her batteries to bear he confounded her with some such incontrovertible truth as this or—changed the subject. This day she had planned a coup, and he had met her, unexpectedly, more than halfway. By the time she had regained her self-control they were past the sentry line and well within the post.

“I want to have a *real* talk with you, Sandy,” she said, as he swung her to the ground in front of their old quarters, where still they lived while fitting up the new.

"You'll have to do it all, 'Cil, if it's Canteen you're hitting at," was the answer, as he led the way up the broad steps; then stopped suddenly, his young face darkening.

A slender, soldierly form had suddenly issued from the hallway at the sound of voices, and there stood Blenke, hand at cap visor, the mournful eyes in mingled depth of respect and appeal, fixed upon his young superior. It was plain to see that Lieutenant Ray little relished the sight. Blenke's desk and duties had been confined to the floor below. Blenke had no occupation or right on the upper deck. Mechanically the subaltern returned the salute, but there were both suspicion and displeasure in his voice as, almost sharply, he inquired:

"What is it, Blenke? Why are you here?"

"By accident, sir," was the prompt reply, subordination and sorrow mingling in tone: as mournful as the mournful eyes. "I was leaving when I thought my name was called—that Mrs. Ray had called me, and I turned back. There seems to be no one here—yet the door was wide open."

"I cannot imagine who could have called you—or why," answered Ray coldly, never relaxing his odd scrutiny of those dark, reproachful eyes. "But, first call has sounded. I won't keep you."

Blenke saluted. One quick glance he shot at the flushing face of his friend and teacher, as though to say, "Plead for me"; then lithe and quick he went bounding

down the steps, Priscilla looking after him. Ray pushed on into the dismantled hallway—into the parlor where rugs and carpets were rolled and heaped and curtains stripped from the rods. He passed through into the little room where stood his father's desk and bookcase, "the den" now doubly lonely and forlorn. He passed swiftly through the dining-room and into the rear hallway, where wide open stood the door to the basement stairway. It proved nothing, however, that that door was unbolted and ajar. In the work of packing and moving the men had been going and coming all the afternoon. Sandy came again to the front and followed Priscilla to the second story. Mother was not in her room, the room that soon in all probability would be hers—the girl-wife of his father's old friend—the girl-wife whose name Sandy Ray had ceased to whisper even to himself. He turned back and Priscilla stood confronting him at the doorway.

"What is it, Sandy? Why should you be so—annoyed at Blenke's believing he was called back?"

"Because I don't believe *him*," said Sandy bluntly, "and—I don't like prowling."

"Oh, how can you be so unfair? Blenke is no prowler, Sandy!" said Priscilla, in fervent reproach. "Blenke is a born gentleman, and I know it, and so will you when you hear his story."

"Oh, fudge!" said Sandy, as he turned impatiently away, entered his own room and slammed the door.

CHAPTER VI

A BRIDE—AND A BEAU

COLONEL and Mrs. Stone in the course of the following fortnight had occasion twice, as the society columns expressed it, to “entertain at dinner for” Major and Mrs. Oswald Dwight, and Mrs. Dwight was the topic of all tongues at Minneconjou before she had been two days at the post. They arrived on a Saturday evening; were met at the station by the hospitable Stones; driven at once to the quarters of that efficient and valuable commanding officer; were the recipients on Sunday of many calls, the guests of honor at dinner Monday evening, at which function they met three of the senior officers and the adjutant of the Sixty-first, each accompanied by his better half; were again on dinner duty Tuesday evening to meet eight others prominent in the military social swim, and at nine o'clock were escorted to the hop room, where the regimental band and practically all the officers and ladies of the garrison were arrayed to welcome them and where until midnight the dance moved merrily on.

To neither dinner was Mrs. Ray invited. She preferred not to make a formal call on Sunday, and when, accompanied by Priscilla and her eldest son, she appeared

at the colonel's quarters on Monday afternoon, Mrs. Dwight and Mrs. Stone had not yet returned from a drive. As little Jim had spent a long hour that morning with his and his own mother's old friend—Dwight himself bringing him over—it is within the bounds of possibility that the drive had been mentioned. The major had remained but a few moments. He was obviously nervous and ill at ease. He had that matter of his change of mind about the quarters to explain, and Marion had desired that he say nothing whatever about it. It was his right. He was bound to consult his wife's wishes before those of any other woman, so why refer to it? But Dwight haplessly stumbled on. There was still something to be said. Mrs. Dwight had expected to have her mother and two cousins with her all summer and September, but Major Farrell found it impossible to leave Mexico after all. Mrs. Farrell could not think of leaving him, especially as his health had suffered very much, thanks to their enforced sojourn in an unsanitary section of old Manila. It appeared that the major was even an applicant for a pension on that ground—a strange proceeding with one so overcharged with mining stock and cattle profits. It might be a month or six weeks yet before the rest of the family came, but Mrs. Dwight was eager to get settled under her own roof where they would be an incumbrance to nobody, and she was going that very day with Mrs. Stone in search of servants. Only a maid had come with them, a maid whose ministrations Inez declared she *must*

have if expected to appear to any advantage in the society to which her husband was accustomed. Mrs. Stone knew of a good cook in town at the hotel whom Mrs. Dwight might tempt away, and then the major had to hurry to the station to superintend the unloading of their car of furniture.

Not until Tuesday night at the reception, therefore, did the Rays meet Mrs. Dwight. Mother and son again came together, Marion in simple evening toilet, Sandy, as required of all officers for that occasion, in full-dress uniform. Mrs. Dwight stood at the colonel's left. The adjutant, facing her, made all the presentations. She was gowned again, as she was that night at Naples, beautifully, extravagantly, and her jewels were, as then, too much in evidence. She had been looking, so remarked her hostess, somewhat pale and sallow during the day, but there was no lack of color, of radiance, of sparkle now. Her face was exquisite in its dark beauty, wondrous in its witchery. Her smile was sweetness itself, and many a woman envied her those perfect teeth rather more than the diamonds. Her soft Southern accent lent a charm of its own to her few words of gracious welcome and acknowledgment. It was noted that she said very little, that she repeated much; but what she said was so sweetly said, and the meaning smile lent so very much more to make it all impressive. Her very attitude was one of supple, sinuous grace, and, whatsoever may have been lacking in the form and variety of her verbal

response to Minneconjou's welcome, there could be no warrant for saying that she did not look, at least, her part. Women stood and watched her and marked the play of her slender little hands, the unconscious, languorous use of her beautiful fan, and women marked how alert, too, were the wonderful dark eyes—how, even as they meltingly and feelingly were uplifted to greet each newcomer, they saw each comer before that comer stood in her presence. She was at her best when Mrs. Ray, pausing first to greet Mrs. Stone and the colonel, was passed on to the star of the evening, and the smiling adjutant, with unpremeditated preference in his tone, announced "Mrs. Ray, Mrs. Dwight; your predecessor at the head of our squadron." And then for the first time that night the bride stepped forward, if only a single pace, and, as though her heart went with it, her hand seemed to leap forward in impulsive greeting.

"I have known Mrs. Ray ever since I first met Major Dwight," said she, with such wealth of gladness in her tone. She never seemed to see the young officer standing with pale, unsmiling face, awaiting his turn to be advanced to the presence. "I cannot begin to say how glad I am to meet her—at last," she continued. And Marion Ray, thoroughbred woman of society, if not of the world, stood in quiet, smiling grace and dignity, listening without a sign of rancor to the swift patter of words from the beautiful lips of the girl who had played havoc with her firstborn's honest young heart, studying the

beauty of the newcomer's wondrous face, and wondering, as mothers will, that even a lover could see therein a resemblance to her own daughter—her dark-eyed Maidie. She hoped that by this time Sandy, too, would see that he had been blind. She responded without embarrassment or effort. Not for a royal ransom would she let this fascinator see that her son had ever so far taken her seriously enough to speak, even to his mother, of a possible admiration.

"The major was very long our near neighbor," she said. "And it is good to have him with us again—and to welcome Mrs. Dwight." Then her hand was extended to Major Dwight as, still smiling and chatting, she seemed imperceptibly sidling toward him; and then Sandy emerged into the field of vision. "So glad to see Mrs. Dwight again," said he, in off-hand assumption of jovial indifference. "Gibson's here, you know. He'll be trotting past the grandstand presently." And though the little hand, slipped into his, gave faint, fluttering, tentative pressure, he edged along, yielding place to 'Cilla and Will, the next comers, and precipitated himself on Dwight. There was unmistakable glance of reproach, perhaps even of pain, from those glorious eyes as the young officer passed unfaltering on, but it was instant; it was unseen by the aging and adoring soldier at her side.

And in this wise was the dreaded meeting accomplished with no one possibly the wiser, with no one warned by

word or sign of the complications and catastrophes to come.

It took Major Dwight but four or five days to set his own house in order and move his birdling into the pretty cage he had planned for her. Willing hands by dozens, both officers and troopers, had wrought with him in the transformation. Beautiful rugs, carpets, and curtains, rare in army parlors, had been lavishly provided—this, too, despite well-founded rumors that Dwight had no such bank account to-day as that he owned to at Manila. Saying no word upon the subject, Marion Ray had noted, nevertheless, how much more expensive and luxurious were the surroundings of Inez than had been those of wise and provident Margaret Dwight. They gave their first dinner, did the Dwights, one week from the date of Colonel Stone's first, and to this was Marion bidden. She had not expected it, had not provided herself with a previous engagement, *had* to accept or decline at once, and accepted.

"Mother," said Sandy, coming in at the moment, "have you seen—has anything been seen of a blouse of mine sent home Tuesday evening? I can't find it, yet the troop tailor swears he left it here himself."

"Who received it?" asked Mrs. Ray. "We were all home dressing for the reception."

"Why, that's the queer part of it," was the answer. "He says he found the back door open, knocked twice and nobody answered, so he walked in the kitchen, laid

the bundle on the table and came out and shut the door after him."

Mrs. Ray thought a moment. "I gave Sarah permission to be out, and Minnie was up here helping us. That may have accounted for his knock being unanswered. You went down before I did, 'Cilla," she continued, turning to her niece, who was busy at the desk. "Was Sarah back then? I thought I heard you speak to someone."

"To two of the Bible class," said 'Cilla. "They came to say we couldn't have the use of that little room back of the chapel. I don't understand it at all. We offered to clean it out and store the boxes in the cellar, but——" And 'Cilla shrugged her shoulders. She had begun to believe that the chaplain was jealous of her influence over certain intractables in the garrison, and was aiming to thwart her. This view Mrs. Ray could not share. She presently put down her pen and passed out into the dining-room.

"It's a dark little hole at best, Pris," said Sandy, "and I offered you a good bright room at the Exchange—the very one your paragon used for about the same purpose when he was stationed here." Sandy *would* tilt at his cousin's fad at times, and this was a time, for Sandy had been crotchety for a week.

"My paragon, as you call him—my ideal of the soldier as we saw him after Porto Rico," answered 'Cilla, with dignity and precision, "held his classes there when the

rest of the building was not what it is to-day—a rum-shop.”

“Not a drop of rum to be had on the premises now, Pris—though there might have been then.”

“I don’t believe it! *My* general was an ascetic. No one ever heard of his using liquor—and wine is only liquor in another form.”

“Come to the library and I’ll show you what your General Ascetic wrote of himself after he was so horribly shot in the Sioux campaign. He said he owed his recovery to a winter in California and drinking plenty of good red wine that made blood.”

But Priscilla knew that Sandy “had the papers to prove it,” and preferred not to see them, lest her ideals come tumbling. “That might have been necessary and by physician’s prescription,” said she. “What I condemn is its usage when there is no excuse. I should feel that I was enticing my class into temptation if I led them daily to the Canteen, and most of them feel as I do about it. Blenke, for instance—though you don’t believe in him, Sandy—when I told him of your offer, he said he would rather not set foot under that roof.”

“When was that?” asked Sandy curiously, seeing a chance for a palpable hit. “He was sent to Leavenworth with the guard of those deserters Wednesday morning, and I did n’t have it to offer to you until Tuesday afternoon.”

“He came that evening to say he was ordered away

with the guard detail. Two of my men have gone. You can see for yourself, Sandy, that for any important duty the total abstainer is chosen."

But Mr. Ray did not answer. He was thinking intently. "Was Blenke one of the two you—spoke of, 'Cilla?" he presently asked.

"No. He came by himself just after they'd gone. He took his leave a very few minutes later. We heard you coming down."

"And where did you receive your visitors, Pris?"

"I spoke with them at the rear door—what other place was there? since you dislike my having soldiers come to the house. Why, Sandy Ray! what are you thinking of? You don't mean——"

"Hush!" said Sandy. There were footsteps at the front and laughing voices, and a bang at the gongbell. Minnie, the housemaid, fluttered through the hallway. "Are the ladies at home?" "Mrs. Stone and Mrs. Dwight!" stage-whispered Priscilla, but in an instant Sandy Ray had found his feet and followed his mother, who was interviewing cook at the kitchen door. "Mrs. Stone and Mrs. Dwight," he echoed, waited until Mrs. Ray had gone to greet the callers, then bolted through the sacred precincts of Sarah's own domain and into the afternoon sunshine beyond. There Minnie presently fetched her young master his broad-brimmed campaign hat, wondering why he should look so pale. Making wide detour, Sandy found himself presently within hail of the

club. It was but an hour before sunset. The cavalry people were just coming back from stables to supper. There were not five officers on the broad veranda, but among them stood a man in civilian dress, whose back had a strangely familiar look and whose voice, when he whirled about and shouted greeting, sent a thrill of astonishment not unmixed with wrath, nerve racking, through the young soldier's slender frame.

"Hullo, Sandy! Got over being grumpy yet? Come up and see a fellow."

What brought Stanley Foster, of all men, here to Minneconjou now?

CHAPTER VII

THE WOLF IN THE SHEEPFOLD

A WEEK rolled on and matters at Minneconjou had become electric. The weather was superb. The sun rose in a cloudless sky long hours before society, as represented at our frontier city and station, followed suit, shook off the fetters of sleep and began bestirring itself for the day. And days were long in that northern latitude, long enough for even the most ambitious and enthusiastic of commanding officers intent on the instruction and development of the force intrusted to his care. Yet the days seemed hardly long enough for Oswald Dwight, whose first difference with the post commander was on the subject of morning gunfire and the reveille. To the scandal of the cavalry service, let it be recorded that in the point at issue, without exception the members of Minneconjou's mounted service sided with the easy-going infantryman at the head of affairs, and against their own immediate leader—the over-energetic, the nervously pushing, prodding, spurring, stirring squadron commander.

During the sweet summer months, all along the broad lands of the Dakotas, the morning gun thundered its salutation to the newborn day as the hands of the clock

so nearly lapped at half-past five. What Dwight demanded of Colonel Stone was permission to rout out the cavalry at half-past four. It was broad daylight, said he. It was the cool and beautiful time of the day. The men could have their coffee at once, then march to stables, lead to water,—the steeds having been already fed by the stable guard,—groom for twenty minutes, march back to barracks, get their matutinal scrub, a hearty breakfast and be out to squadron drill when all was still fresh, sparkling and exhilarating before the mountain breeze, the lowland dust, or indeed before garrison society, was astir; then they could all be back in time for guard-mounting and the multifarious drills and duties of the morning. Dwight found his people well up in saddle work, as was to be expected of men long led by so genuine a trooper as “Billy” Ray, but they were correspondingly slack in foot and sabre drill, and Dwight in his day had been one of the famous drillmasters of the —th, and seemed beset with desire to keep up the record now. “What would you be doing from nine to noon?” asked Stone, strumming the desk with his finger tips and studying curiously the pale, keen, eager face of the cavalryman.

“Company drill afoot, sabre drill, setting up—almost anything!” was the impatient answer. “These men are soft, sluggish, torpid. Troopers should be all wire and catgut. I want to put those four commands in perfect trim for anything, Colonel, and I can’t do it under five hours’ drill a day.”

But Stone shook his head. There was no occasion, he maintained, for robbing them of an hour of their sleep. They had to work harder than his men, anyhow, and, if anything, should be given more sleep, not less.

"Then put them to bed at ten o'clock—or nine, if need be," said Dwight, impatient of demur; but Stone proved obdurate. "I see no reason for so radical a change," said he, to the relief of the juniors, who feared Dwight's vehement onward nature might prevail over the placidity of Stone; and so the new-made major was fain to content himself with sounding mess call right after reveille, then "Boots and Saddles" in place of "Stables," and, by dispensing with morning grooming, getting his troops into line on the flats to the south and starting a humming squadron drill before seven o'clock.

Time had been in the long-ago happy days when it was quite the thing for Mrs. Ray, Mrs. Truscott, Margaret Dwight, and other women of the old regiment to ride, drive, or stroll out to the ground and watch their soldier-husbands through much of the morning's dashing drill. The effect was good in more ways than one. It keyed up the pride of the men and kept down the profanity of their mentors, some of whom, as was a way in the old days of the mounted service, *would* break out with sudden and startling blasphemy when things went wildly amiss. It is easy on foot to bring instant order out of apparent chaos. The stark command "Halt!" does the business; but, given tenscore, high-strung, grain-fed, spirited steeds,

tearing at their bits and lunging full gallop in mad race for a charge, it often happens that neither voice nor trumpet, nor tugging, straining bridle arm can prevail, and it is then the air rings with expletives. No one ever heard Truscott swear. He was a model of self-control. Dwight, too, had been renowned for the success with which he handled horses and men and maintained his personal serenity. But Marion Ray more times than a few in the earlier days of her married life had cause to blush for Billy, who, the idol of his men and perhaps the most magnetic drillmaster and troop leader in the regiment, so lost himself in the enthusiasm and dash of squadron drill at the trot or gallop, that his Blue Grass exhortations could be heard over the thunder of a thousand hoofs, to the entire delight of the sorrel troop, the sympathetic joy of their rivals and the speechless dismay of the pious.

"Tut-tut-tut!" was a dear old chaplain wont to say; "is it not strange that so good a man can use such very bad language?" Yet Captain Ray in private life shrank from profanity as he did from punch. On mounted drill it rippled from his lips with unconscious, unpremeditated fluency.

Just as in the old days, therefore, wives, sisters, and sweethearts of the dashing horsemen of Minneconjou were now riding, driving, or strolling out to the edge of the drill ground and enjoying the spirited scene. It gave them an hour of bracing air and sparkling dew and

early sunshine and a wonderful appetite for breakfast. Mrs. Ray did not go. Neither her husband nor her son had now any part in the panorama, and, looking from her window she could see all she cared to see of what might be going on—and more. The sound of Sandy's boot-heels overhead told her that he, too, was up and observant, though Sandy, when Priscilla, as usual precipitate, managed to refer to it at the breakfast table, parried the tongue thrust with a tale about "best light for shaving."

No, there were none of Mrs. Ray's little household who went forth to see the early squadron drill, but there were others—many others—and most observed, if not most observant of these, was the beautiful young wife of the squadron commander and her invariable escort, Dwight's former fellow-campaigner, their fellow-voyager of the *Hohenzollern*, and now their very appreciative guest, Captain Stanley Foster, only just promoted to his troop in the —th Cavalry and waiting orders at Minneconjou.

Mrs. Dwight was not much given to walking. She could dance untiringly for hours, but other pedestrianism wearied her. Mrs. Dwight was as yet even less given to riding. She explained that the major preferred she should wait a while until her horse and English horse equipment came. Lieutenant Scott, who had met her in Manila, said he had a little tan-colored Whitman that would just suit her, whereat Mrs. Dwight, between pal-ing and coloring, took on something of a tan shade over

her dusky beauty and faltered that "the Major preferred the English—to the forked-seat—for a lady." It would seem as though she desired it forgotten that her normal way of riding was astride, whereas more than half her auditors, the officers at least, regarded that as the proper and rational seat for her sex. Mrs. Dwight, caring neither to walk nor to ride, therefore was quite content to appear for two or three successive mornings in a lovely little phaeton with a pony-built team in front, a pygmy "tiger" behind and a presentable swain beside her. The fourth morning brought a rain and no drill, the fifth no rain nor Mrs. Dwight, nor did she again appear at that early hour despite the fact that the drills daily became more dashing and picturesque. Her interest, she explained, had been rather on her husband's account, but she knew so little about such matters she felt her inferiority to *real* army ladies who had been born and bred to and understood it, and then after dancing so late she wondered how anybody *could* be up so early.

The major himself, probably, could not have stood it, but he, not being a dancing man, had taken to skipping away to bed at or before eleven on such nights as Minneconjou tripped the light fantastic toe, but "Inez so loved to dance" he considerably left her to finish it, with Foster to fetch her home; which Foster did.

But, of the few elders at Minneconjou who had personal knowledge of Dwight's prowess as a cavalry drill-master in by-gone days, and of the many who, being told

thereof, had gone forth to see and to enjoy, there lived now not one who had not suffered disappointment. So far from being the calm, masterful, yet spirited teacher and leader, clear and explicit in his instructions and serene and self-controlled where men and horses became nervous and fidgety, Dwight proved strangely petulant and querulous. His tone and manner were complaining, nagging, even snarling. Nothing seemed to please him. Troop leaders, subalterns and sergeants were forever coming in for a rasping, and each successive day the command paced slowly, sedately homeward, cooling off after a hot drill, looking more and more sullen and disgusted. Officers dismounted at the Club, quaffed "shandygaff" and sometimes even "Scotch and soda" in silent sense of exasperation. The men rode away to stables, rubbed down and, as they plied the wisps, said opprobrious things between their set teeth. As for the horses, they took counsel together when turned out to herd and settled it to their satisfaction that something was sorely amiss with the major—who had at last begun to swear.

And something was sorely amiss with Dwight, as anyone who noted his brilliant, restless eyes, his haggard face and fitful manner could not fail to see. It was at this stage of the proceedings, as Stone squarely owned up later, that he as post commander should have taken Dwight to task, even to the extent of administering correction. But the strongest soldier is sometimes disarmed at sight of a fellow's suffering, and, for fear of adding one

pang, will suppress a needed word. Thus it happens that occasionally a commander passes unrebuked a soldier's fault. Thus it happens time and again that men, stern and unflinching in dealing with their fellows, submit in silence to years of a woman's abuse, because "she's such a sufferer."

But here was something Stone might, and possibly should, have done and thereby measurably cleared the social sky and surely earned Dwight's silent gratitude, and this Stone did not do, even though spurred thereto by a clear-visioned wife, and that was—say a word of admonition to Captain Foster.

He deserved it. All Minneconjou was a unit on that head. He was as utterly out of place there as a cat in a creamery. They who had heard the story of his attentions to Mrs. Dwight during the *Hohenzollern's* run from Gibraltar to Governor's Island were disturbed by his sudden and unheralded appearance at the post, and distressed that Dwight should be among the first to welcome him, and the one, and at first the only one, to invite him to a room under his roof. Men looked every which way but at each other and held their tongues when it was announced that Foster was the guest of the Dwights. Women looked into each other's eyes and gasped and said all manner of things as the news went round. Yet what, at first at least, was there to block the plan? The infantry officers felt that *they* must not take the initiative; it was purely a cavalry affair. Dwight and Foster had

served together several years. Dwight possibly did feel, as he too often took occasion to say, more than grateful to Foster for "his courtesy to Mrs. Dwight while I was cooped up in my stateroom." Two or three cavalry chums, taking secret counsel together, hit upon a blundering, clumsy, best-intentioned scheme, and Washburn, who could n't bear Foster and had never foregathered with him, was deputed, as the only captain with spare rooms and no family, to take the bull by the horns and the unwanted visitor to his ingle nook, which Washburn did with simulated joviality and about as follows:

"Say, old man, *you* don't want to be roosting in a dove-cote while the birds are billing and cooing. You can't have any fun at Dwight's. You'll get nothing but Apollinaris between meals. Come to my shack, where there's a room—and a demijohn—all ready for you," which bid proved, unhappily, none too alluring. Foster thanked him with a glint in his eye. "Dwight asked me long ago," said he, which was the petrified truth, though Dwight's words were perfunctory, and the invitation one of those things so often said to a man when the sayer hopes to Heaven he's seeing the last of him.

But now that Foster *was* here, his guest, nothing could exceed the glow of Dwight's hospitality. It was painful to note the eagerness with which he sought to assure all Minneconjou of his long-standing friendship for Foster in face of the fact that some of the squadron well knew they had never met in Margaret's day, and were never

really comrades thereafter. Moreover, they were men of utterly divergent mold and temperament. Dwight had been reared in the shadow of the flag, a soldier by birth, lineage and education. Foster had come in from civil life, after a not too creditable career at college. He had come, moreover, with the repute of being a Squire of Dames in "swagger" Eastern society. He danced well, dressed well, and talked well—when he felt like it. He "knew a lot," said men who knew little outside of the army.

He knew enough, at all events, to realize that army society would be far less tolerant of a "squire" of his kind than had been that of Gotham, and during his decade of service that, at least, had not been held as his principal fault. A semi-cynical manner, a propensity for stirring fellows on their sore points, a pronounced selfishness and an assumed intimacy with men who disliked him were the things that most conspired to make him unpopular. He had ability; he could be agreeable, but indolence and indifference dwarfed his powers. It was not until he came under the spell of this dark girl's grace and beauty that Stanley Foster had succeeded in doing anything worthy of mention. Now he was being mentioned far more than he wished, and, though he heard it not, he knew.

But they went to a dance the night of the day he came, and Dwight gave a dinner the next night, and another the next. Then there had to be others given in return,

and morn, noon, afternoon and evening, Foster found himself at the side of Mrs. Dwight. What could she do? He came to stay only three days, but the week went by, and so, possibly, did his orders. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday they were out at morning drill. Then the pretty phaeton and its lovely occupant and her vigilant convoy came no more. Inez said she "looked like a fright at that hour of the morning, anyway," in which statement most women agreed. Possibly it was that that stayed her.

However, a second Sunday had come since Foster's advent, and the squadron was having a rest and the chaplain holding service, and Major Dwight, as was his wont, came, book in one hand and little Jim clinging fondly to the other, to kneel among the worshipers, to reverently follow the beautiful service, his boy snuggling to his side and reading aloud from the same page. It was the service Margaret had loved, and taught her husband to honor, and had won his promise that Jimmy should ever be led to it, and loyally, devoted, had the father fulfilled the promise, even after the young wife came to wean him from much that Margaret had inspired. Inez this day came not with them. To begin with, Inez had been reared in the fold of the Mother Church, and, though years had served to loose the bonds and possibly sap what little she ever had of faith, she had sought, at least, no substitute. Obediently had she gone at first with her soldier-husband and looked, in the eyes of his kith and

kin, the picture of meek piety and adoration as she followed the new, strange ritual. But, once away from family observation, Inez had found refuge in hebdomadal headaches that came with the Lord's Day and kept her from church. She was "feeling far from well this morning," said Dwight, in answer to queries, and had been persuaded to remain in bed. So he and Jimmy had come to church and Foster had gone to the Club to write some letters and wire to Washington, and all were "present or accounted for," as Captain Washburn grimly announced at the Club. It was a lovely warm Sunday, too, and the old chaplain was effective as a reader. The choir was capital, despite Priscilla's criticisms, and the attendance was large. Army folk, as a rule, flock but sparsely to the sanctuary, but Minneconjou had not a few devout church people, even in the ranks, Blenke being so earnest in his piety that when detailed for Sunday guard he never failed to effect an exchange, even though it cost him two tours for one. Furthermore, it was communion service, and unusually long.

Marion Ray had entered early—Sandy, pale-faced and thin, at her side; and together they had knelt, mother and son, and then sat silently awaiting the "Processional." When Dwight and Jimmy walked up the aisle and took a pew on the other side and nearer the altar, Marion had smiled fond greeting to the little fellow, and he had answered. Twice as she gazed at them later, Dwight's arm about Jimmy's curly head, his sinewy hand resting

on the further shoulder and drawing him to his side, heavy tears welled up into the blue eyes of the tender-hearted woman. Never yet had that strong, sinewy hand been uplifted to inflict the lightest chastisement on Margaret's beloved boy. Only the day before on his regular visit, nestling to her knee and telling her laughingly how Sergeant Shock, the schoolmaster, had walloped Scotty Burns, the band leader's eldest hope, Jimmy had looked up suddenly into her eyes. "Why, Aunt Marion," he said, "only think! I've never known what it was to be whipped. Can you fancy daddy's ever using a strap on me?"

"God forbid!" she shuddered, not knowing why, thinking perhaps only what agonies that would have cost Margaret, and then Priscilla had come in and their confidences ceased. Priscilla was firm in her theory that children were too much petted and coddled nowadays, and that more of the rod and less of rhubarb was what they needed.

Suddenly, just after the second lesson, while the rich ringing voices of the soldier choir were chanting the "Gloria," little Jim was seen to bow his head and burrow for his handkerchief. Dwight looked down, bent over him, whispered a word or two, smiled encouragement and fond assurance, and, blushing very much, with downcast eyes and his face half hidden in cambric, the lad came forth and hastened down the aisle and out into the brilliant sunshine beyond.

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"Nose-bleed," whispered Dwight to Mrs. Stone, who leaned back, sympathetically, from her pew. "It sometimes seizes him just that way."

And the stately service went uninterruptedly on, and Jimmy over home, and little more was said of the incident until the coming of another day.

CHAPTER VIII

ACCUSING LETTERS

FOR a week Miss Priscilla Sanford had been in a state of mind bordering on the ecstatic. For months letters of portentous size, bearing the stamp of a great and powerful organization of Christian women, had been left at her door, and many an hour had that energetic maiden been devoting to correspondence with boards, committees, secretaries, etc., adding much to the burden of the mail orderly, and not a little to his malevolence. A dour and unsocial Scot was McPheirson, as he called himself, but there was wisdom in the selection, for Kennedy, his predecessor, was as genial as Mac was glum, and Kennedy's fall from grace was due mainly to his amiable weakness for the opposite sex, a trait that had led to his lingering far too long in the early spring mornings—and many a “storm house”—along the row, and to concomitant complaint. Letters delayed, letters even diverted from their proper destination, had been all too often charged to him, for more than one housemaid, not to mention a mistress or two, was possessed of a devil of curiosity as to the correspondence of many another, and Kennedy was too much interested in all of them to be austere. Not so McPheir-

son. There was not another of his clan, there were but three of his nationality, in the entire garrison, for seldom, save under the flag of Great Britain, is the Scot in peace time a soldier. Mac had served his native country in the "Forty Twa"; had come to the States a time-expired man; had met his fate, married, and been bereft and deserted within two years, and, like many another man, he had sought in the profession of arms the peace denied him at the domestic fireside. Uncle Sam employs no recruiting solicitors; he needs none, for the petticoat drives to his ranks more men than he will take. Something of Mac's history was made known to his colonel, and when Kennedy had to be replaced, although Mac had not been a year in the regiment, Stone issued his mandate. "*There's* the man for the place," said he to the adjutant. "There'll be no peeping and prying with that red-headed Sawny in charge."

Priscilla had not been slow to note the substitution, nor to divine the cause. Priscilla had much disapproved of Kennedy, and Kennedy of her. "That prayin', pryin', pesterin' old maid beyant," he described her to the surgeon's becaped and bewitching Kathleen, the belle of the non-commissioned officers' ball. Priscilla found in Presbyterian Mac a far more promising subject, and was aggrieved and dismayed at her lack of success. McPherson would only stand at salute, frigidly respectful, but as icily impenetrable. Mac scented mischief at the outset. He had heard much among the men about Miss

Sanford's kindergarten, the Bible class, the prayer meetings, and her persistent preachings against the Canteen. Now, Mac himself disapproved of that institution, and hearing of this—I fear me Sandy told her, and for motives altogether mischievous—Miss Sanford had lain in wait for Mac, and held him one brief moment in converse at the door. The story of that episode delighted Minneconjou and the minority, let us say, when it was later told in Congress.

“I'm so glad to hear, McPherson,” said Miss Sanford, beaming upon him, as she took from his hand the little packet of letters, “that you, too, are one of the right sort of soldiers. Now, tell me why *you* disapprove of the Canteen,” for Priscilla was sending that day another long letter of experiences to the *Banner of Light*; and the reply came, prompt, unflinching, uncompromising, but—most unsatisfactory:

“Because, mem, ye canna get a drap o' whusky.”

And so saying McPherson was all simple sincerity. Bred to its use in the raw fogs of his native glen, accustomed to his modest daily tot even when on “sentry go” at the Castle, or the water gate at Gibraltar, he and his comrades of the Black Watch had been reared in the broad faith that teaches temperance, not intolerance. Their canteen sergeant set the limit, not the pace, and doubtless Mac in 'listing for a soldier in the land of liberty had looked perhaps for even greater license. Beer he called “swipes,” and despised. Rhine wine,

tasted but once, set his grim face awry, and presently townward. Mac's one peccadillo since joining at Minneconjou was a rantin', roarin' drunk in Silver Hill that cost Uncle Sam three days of his services, and the Highlander three months of his pay. There were fines both military and municipal. In disgust Mac swore off. He "had na use for a consairn that compelled a mon to walk three miles to get a wee drappie—and lose three months' siller."

But Priscilla was undaunted still. She had written glowingly, enthusiastically, unceasingly, of all her efforts to promote the cause of temperance among the nation's soldiery. She had told much of her converts to total abstinence, and little of their backsliding. She had managed, through Blenke and others, to get a transcript of the daily guard report, and the punishments awarded by the summary and general courts-martial. Minneconjou had now a garrison of some eight hundred men, with a big and bustling frontier town only a few miles away. Thanks to the system of the post Exchange and the careful supervision, both of its customers and its supplies, drunkenness had been reduced almost to a minimum. Not one out of one hundred men was in confinement, either awaiting or serving sentence. Not more than ten in two months had been fined for minor breaches of discipline due to drink. Some old toppers, relics of the sutler-shop days of the army, were still to be found, men whose stomachs could not be always appeased by mild measures,

and demanded the coarser stimulant—in bottles smuggled from town; but every case, however mild, had been made, it seems, the text for one of Priscilla's vivid letters descriptive of the depravity still rampant in the army, and due entirely to the presence of that blot upon Christian civilization—the Canteen.

And well had they served their purpose. In fancied security, knowing that their methods had resulted in the greatest good to the greatest number, the officers on duty with troops had read with smiling tolerance marked copies of Eastern papers detailing the concerted efforts of the crusaders against the post Exchange. Congress had been memorialized. Congress had good naturedly listened to the successive readings of a bill abolishing the system and forbidding the sale of either beer or wine at any military post in the United States. Then, brimful, bustling with excitement, and rejoicing, Priscilla read that her letters had been largely instrumental in winning over certain of the opposition, and that when the question came to a vote the noble leaders of a noble cause would be present in force, and when the House sat, there—there would they sit and watch, and woe betide the advocate of the arch fiend rum that dare vote against their sacred measure. Before the army could realize what was coming, the House sat in judgment on the bill, the Society sat in judgment on the House; its members glanced casually at the subject and fearfully at the galleries and—succumbed. “The Senate will kill it, anyhow, so we

might as well make ourselves solid,—it's only the army, anyway," was the expression of one long-headed legislator. Priscilla screamed—squealed rather—in ecstasy over the telegram brought her at breakfast, threw the paper to Sandy and herself into a *pas seul* that fairly amazed Aunt Marion and scandalized the cat. But, when a week or so later the Senate, too, quailed before the basilisk eyes in the galleries, and the bill went to the President and became at once a law, it is safe to say that, for one memorable day, Miss Sanford not unwarrantably looked upon herself as of infinitely more consequence than the commanding officer.

Then, in the midst of the amaze and bewilderment that fell upon the fort, came sensation. Colonel Stone sent for Sandy Ray, nodded "withdraw" to his adjutant, who closed the door behind him, and then looked up with somber eyes at the pale-faced young fellow before him.

"Your occupation's gone, Sandy," said he sorrowfully. "They've pulled from under us the best prop to order and discipline that ever we had. It has n't been a square deal. They won by methods we could n't hope to meet, and,"—drawing forth certain newspaper clippings,—"here are specimens. For your father's sake, I liked you before I grew to like you for your own; but if your father himself were here, and head of the house instead of yourself, I'd have to hold him to account as I must hold you. Read—that."

And Sandy, turning paler still, and quivering with

mingled wrath and shame, stood and read somewhat as follows:

At Fort Minneconjou the situation is even worse. We have it from indisputable authority that, so far from seeking to check the evil among their men, officers of the highest rank freely mingle with them at the garrison saloon, and urge and incite them to drink. Is it to be wondered at, therefore, that the sickening scenes depicted by our correspondent are of almost daily occurrence?—that young lads, fresh from the pure influences of peaceful homes, the mother's blessing still echoing in their ears, the mother's kiss still warm upon their brows, are forced to witness such revolting crimes, to hear such ribald oaths, and gradually, through the example of officers seeking doubtless to increase the revenue derived from the sale of the vile poisons they purchase at wholesale from equally vile distillers, and in the hope of winning the favor of these all-powerful superiors, to forget the teachings of home, the prayers of parents and kindred, and to yield to the tempter and become in turn slaves of the soul-destroying habit, helpless victims of rum? How long, O Lord, how long will the representatives of a free and enlightened people continue to sanction such infamy?

"That's one of a dozen editorials," said the colonel. "What most concerns us is the one of a dozen letters on which it is based. Now, look at this." And Sandy read.

FORT MINNECONJOU, S. D., *May 30, 19—.*

EDITOR BANNER OF LIGHT:

Since my last, of a week ago, no less than seven soldiers, men who, could they be divorced from drink, would be ornaments to the service of their country, have been thrown into the garrison prison, or hauled before their judges,—these latter the very men

who advocate and encourage the sale of intoxicants,—to receive their punishment for various crimes and misdemeanors committed while under the influence of drink. And so it goes. They, the helpless victims, must suffer the consequences of the crimes of their officers, who are able to divide each month the profits of their nefarious traffic, and go utterly unwhipped of justice. Only two days ago, speaking of this matter after morning service, one of our veteran soldiers said, with tears in his eyes, "If the Christian people of this land only dreamed what sins were being committed under cover of the devil-inspired Canteen, they would rise up as one man and demand its extinction." But, as I said before, so long as their most popular officers are permitted unrebuked to meet them, and carouse with them, and thereby teach and inspire the young and thoughtless soldier to drink, what can we accomplish? The sights and sounds, the fearful scenes and frightful curses to which I have been witness here, all due to the demon that lurks within that protected rum hole opposite my window, would appall a Christian community—which this is not.

Sandy turned to the wrapper, his lips almost as gray as his young face. It was the copy of a letter from the pastor of a church in a far Eastern city, inclosing five newspaper clippings, and calling upon the Secretary of War to order the instant court-martial and dismissal of the military officers responsible for the abominable state of affairs existing at Fort Minneconjou; which letter the Secretary had respectfully referred to the Commanding General, Department of the Middle West, for "investigation and report," which paper and inclosures that official had respectfully referred to the commanding officer, Fort

Minneconjou, with similar demand. Stone had received, read, remarked and—sent for Sandy.

An hour later, as Miss Sanford was sallying forth on “an errand of mercy,” as she had usually heard such missions described,—she was going to the post hospital with a fresh supply of temperance tracts and a small box of cherries,—she encountered her cousin at the door, and something in his face made her own lose color. The Dwights’ phaeton came bowling down the road at the moment, Mrs. Dwight bowing and smiling bewitchingly, Captain Foster gallantly lifting his derby, for, when others could not wear it, Foster favored civilian dress. Miss Sanford responded vaguely, Sandy not at all. Possibly he did not wish to see. Possibly, said Priscilla to herself, it is *that* that has so upset him. She hoped, indeed, it might be that, and not that which, almost instantly, she feared. He said no word at all, merely motioned to her to turn back. Priscilla was accustomed to dominate, not to domination, but she saw the look of the father in the stern young face before her. Uncle Will she knew was the mildest of men in his dealings with women, until fully aroused. Then Uncle Will became dangerous, and looked very much as did Sandy now. The first question as he practically backed her into the little army parlor was, “Is mother home?”

Priscilla looked aloft. “In her room,” she said.

“Then I cannot—speak to you now,” said Sandy. “Colonel Stone has called me to account for one of the

five inclosures to this paper. Before I answer we've got to have, you and I, a clear understanding, and before we can have that you must read these, and think over what other slanders you have written."

"I was going to the hospital," faltered Priscilla. "Sullivan's worse—and Blenke's been so queer——"

"The hospital, Sullivan, and Blenke can wait," said Sandy firmly, though his voice was shaking. "Colonel Stone and I cannot. I shall say nothing to mother of this as yet. Be ready to see me here at twelve o'clock. Mother will not be home."

So saying, and leaving in her hands the fateful packet, Ray turned abruptly and left the house, Priscilla mounting slowly to her room.

It still lacked an hour to noon, and she had time to read and to think. It was past the hour at which Jimmy Dwight generally came running in to say good-morning to Aunt Marion, but Jimmy had not come. Out on the sunlit parade a dozen garrison boys and girls were in the midst of a shouting, shrieking, frolicsome game of "Pull-Away," and Jimmy, usually one of the blithest and merriest, was not there. Priscilla had noted this when, from the little veranda of the lieutenant's quarters but a few minutes before, she had been disapprovingly watching the sport—it was so uninstructional, thought Priscilla. She could not, from the window at the side, see much of the parade. Over against it, midway along the barrack line of the northeast front, she could see the

Exchange building, could see Sandy more than halfway across, walking even more swiftly, stiffly, than ever. She saw the few loungers and convalescents, sunning themselves on the southern benches, rising to their feet at the approach of the young officer. She could hear the tramp of the two battalions and the majors' ringing commands, exercising, one on the plain to the south where Dwight's squadron disported itself before breakfast, the other out on the parade. She could hear faintly the fine band of the infantry practicing at the assembly room adjoining the Exchange. From the open window of Sandy's room, across the hall, she could have seen the deserted veranda of the officers' club. Half an hour hence it would be swarming with thirsty and perspiring gentlemen in khaki just in from a lively drill. She felt rather than saw what was said in that relentless paper on her dressing table, and she shrank from the opening and reading. Sandy's face had told her what to expect. Sandy's tongue had spoken of slanders—slanders that well she realized, like curses, had come home to roost. She could not say, even to herself, that what she had written was never meant for public eyes. She had hoped—she had meant—it should be published, and that all good Christian men and women, readers of the *Banner of Light*, should approve and applaud her righteous efforts in behalf of so great and glorious a cause. But it had not occurred to her that the *Banner* would ever find its way to so godless a community as this at Minneconjou—

where her statements might be challenged. She was stunned, temporarily, by this most unlooked-for catastrophe. Uncle Will and Aunt Marion had been her best friends and benefactors, and, even though duty demanded that she should make clear to them how deeply they erred in their attitude on so vital a question as that of the Canteen, she knew, and well knew, that what she had written in the enthusiasm of her faith, the intensity of her zeal, was far from warrantable by the cold facts in the case. She followed Sandy with her eyes as he neared the veranda,—saw the hands of the half dozen men go up in salute,—saw him suddenly turn and, facing west, salute in turn, and then the colonel marched into her field of vision, and the veteran of the Civil War and the subaltern of a few skirmishes stood a moment in conference, then strode away together toward the townward gate and the “auxiliary” guard-house, the orderly following after.

And then she heard her aunt’s voice at her door.

“Have you seen anything of Jimmy this morning, ’Cilla? It’s strange he has not come,” and then cook from the kitchen appeared at the landing. “That young man, mum, Mr. Blenke, would like to speak with Miss Sanford a minute.” And, leaving the papers on her bureau, glad of a respite, Priscilla hastened down.

Blenke’s big mournful brown eyes had of late been darker than ever, and dark circles had sunk in beneath them. Blenke’s sallow face had taken on an even sallow lower hue. “Nothing but indigestion and lack of exer-

cise," said the junior doctor, of whom Priscilla had made inquiries. "The man spends his leisure hours moping or mooning around by himself. He ought to be made to play ball, tennis, spar, ride, wrestle, or something. He's a day-dreamer—maybe a pipe-dreamer," hazarded he, in conclusion, with a queer look at Priscilla, who had flushed indignantly at the insinuation. Blenke had sorrowfully and virtuously repelled that insinuation the moment she brought it to his attention, but circumstances had been combining to make her uneasy about her paragon. If not a "pipe-dreamer," Blenke was becoming odd and nervous, queer, and twitchy. To-day he came with a plea she had never heard him make before. Blenke, who never drank, gambled, smoked, swore, or otherwise misconducted himself, had come to tell Miss Sanford in the best of language that he had urgent need of ten dollars and two days' pass. The pass his captain had signed on the spot, but he would n't stand for the ten dollars. Blenke would tell Miss Sanford all about it on his return, but now there was not a moment to lose unless he lose also the train to Rapid City. Would Miss Sanford help him?

Priscilla had but ten dollars to her name, but swiftly she sped upstairs to get it. The bugle was sounding the recall from drill as she entered her little room, unlocked an upper drawer of the dressing-table, and found the two bills in her slender *portemonnaie*. The batch of official papers, with the portentous, red ink-lined, third indorse-

ment uppermost, still stared at her from the prim, white-covered top, and impatiently she thrust it into the shallow pocket of the summer skirt and hastened away downstairs. Blenke's eyes were eloquent with subdued sadness, mystery, and gratitude as he received the money and turned away. The children out in front on the parade, with shrill shouting and laughter, had just gone racing away toward the eastward gate, and as their clamor died in the distance Priscilla's quick ear caught the sound of sobbing and a piteous wail for help.

Ever sympathetic with those in distress, she hurried through the hallway, out through the gate and there, crouched at the foot of the little shade tree at the edge of the parade, with blood streaming through the clutching fingers from a slashing cut at the edge of the left eye, was little George Thornton, son of a junior officer of infantry. Priscilla in an instant was bending over him.

"What is it, Georgie, dear? Oh, how *did* you get so cruel a hurt?"

Sobs and screams were at first the only answer. Clasp ing her kerchief to the wound with her right hand, and leading the little fellow, half running, with the left, she guided him homeward, where presently a badly frightened brace of women, mother and housemaid, busily hindered her skilled fingers in bathing and bandaging the cut. It was not long before the bleeding was stanch ed, the patient soothed and comforted and the maid had gone for the doctor. Meanwhile the mother, too,

had made her demand, "Who—who could have done this?" And to every such query there was but one answer, "Jimmy Dwight."

"Surely not on purpose!" ventured Priscilla, in the interest of peace, truth, and justice, only to receive with vehement emphasis the to-be-expected answer of the stung, angered, and irresponsible child.

"He *did*, I tell you! We were racin', an'—an' when I was gettin' past him, he just whacked me with all his might."

The boys had all disappeared, when presently Priscilla again came forth, homeward bound. They had swarmed over to the stables, where some troop horses had broken away from their herd, and were having a hilarious time of it, but one or two little girls were slowly returning, and to the foremost of these Priscilla addressed herself for information. Was Jimmy Dwight with the other boys? Yes, he had only come out a few minutes ago. Had they seen how Georgie Thornton was hurt? They had not. *They* had started with the foremost, and George and Jimmy had run back after a ball, and so got behind. But presently came Kitty Blair, and Kitty *had* seen. Tiring of the chase she had dropped out as the last boys went bounding by her, and Jimmy Dwight was swinging his jacket, and he just slashed Georgie Thornton right in the face with it. Yes, she was sure. Millie Cross had seen it, too, and had run home to tell her mother.

Thoughtfully, with downcast eyes, Priscilla retraced her steps. Orderly and mess call were sounding now, and with a start she remembered that this was the moment set by Sandy for her explanation as to the clipping, and, glancing up in sudden fright, she found standing at the doorway, the accusing papers in hand, not her cousin, but her cousin's mother, her hostess and her benefactress—Marion Ray.

CHAPTER IX

AN INVITATION—TO GO

BETWEEN early morning drills and the fact that Jimmy was now quite big and old enough to look after himself, the father's supervision of the morning tub, rub, and toilet had ceased, and there was but time for a hug and a word before the major swallowed his solitary cup of coffee, swung into saddle, and trotted away. On this eventful morning he had kept his men at their work rather longer than usual and to no good purpose. In common with the rest of the garrison, Dwight had heard the fate of the Canteen, and heard it without remark. An abstemious man, he preferred that others should be the same, but other far more pressing matters were uppermost in his mind; matters here at Minneconjou—matters in far-away Mexico, where an importunate father-in-law, after making ducks and drakes of the thousands liberally supplied him, was now demanding more, or "all would be lost." Then it transpired that a lawyer in town had been retained, by certain of that father-in-law's creditors, to press Major Dwight for payment of the same, or with evidence of fraudulent doings on part of Mr. Farrell. To meet this lawyer, Dwight had ridden to town right after drill, and

up to noon had not returned. Foster and Mrs. Dwight, driving thither in the pretty phaeton, with the pygmy tiger, were surprised, possibly disconcerted—to see his orderly with the two horses patiently waiting in front of the office. Possibly that had something to do with their return soon after twelve o'clock. Possibly there was design in Foster's selection of that hour of the day to visit the office of the post Exchange, still in active operation along all its accustomed lines, awaiting official orders, so far as comforting fluids were concerned, to close. At all events, there were no witnesses to a scene,—and but few to certain very audible words,—that became memorable in the chronicles of Fort Minneconjou from that day forth.

It will be remembered that Priscilla saw the meeting between the post commander and his Exchange officer, and their move in company toward the townward gate. But at that distance it was not to be expected that she could see the deep concern in the colonel's face or hear anything of the conversation that passed between them. It was barely an hour since their brief interview at the office. The colonel then looked solemn enough, but now the concern and smoldering wrath in his deep-set eyes exceeded anything his adjutant had ever seen or that Sandy Ray deemed possible in a soldier usually so placid and philosophical.

"Come with me, Mr. Ray," said Stone, in the hearing of the listening men. "There's a matter I want to talk

over." Then, once fairly out of earshot, and after a glance to see that his orderly was well to the rear, "Sandy, were you at your office yesterday morning?"

"No, sir; I was at church."

"Ah, yes. I should have known. I used to go, too, while I had a mother," sighed the colonel. "But that was very long ago." Then, with sudden energy, "You would n't know whether—er—Captain Foster had been over here at the Exchange—writing letters? Ah—er—who would?"

"Sergeant Bates, sir, probably."

"It's a bit of business I don't like, Sandy. Nobody but my adjutant knows, though some may guess, and I'm going to tell you because——"

"I wish you *would* n't, sir. I—own I don't like Captain Foster," was the blunt interruption.

"I've got to, lad, for I may have to act! But it was your father who spake there, and you have known Foster longer and perhaps better than any man here—Major Dwight possibly excepted. There are reasons why I *can't* ask Dwight."

"Then, Colonel," and with face still graver the young officer turned appealingly to his commander, "all the more I ask you—don't ask me."

"See here, Ray," said the colonel, halting short. "No, keep back, orderly, I don't want you!" he added with impatient wave of the hand. "There's a piece of devilment going on at this post that it's my business to stop

before it gets too late. Pray God it is n't too late *yet!* That man has no business here as Dwight's guest. He has no business here at all. He is n't straight. He tells everybody he can't imagine where his orders have gone, and that he's been wiring everywhere to find them. This morning I find that he's lying. Yesterday he left Dwight's house to write letters at the Club, as he said, and send more dispatches. He stayed there only about fifteen minutes, until church was fairly started. Then he said he wanted some keg beer which can't be had at the Club, and so he left, saying he'd go to the Canteen and finish the beer and his letters at your desk. That's almost the last they saw of him, but before eleven he went through the east gate and down to old Sergeant Sweeny's on the south flats. Sweeny served with him seven years ago, and he's laid up with rheumatism. The second relief started just at eleven, and the first problem the recruit on No. 4 had to deal with, before the relief that left him was fairly out of sight, was what to do with a gentleman in civilian dress who was crossing his post. The sentry stopped him, and the stranger said: 'I'm Captain Foster, staying at Major Dwight's,' and went on in the back way. If Sweeny confirms this story I shall send for Captain Foster and—until this is settled never mind about that other matter. Er—have you seen Miss Sanford?"

"Yes, sir," answered Ray, half choking, "and—she was to answer me fully at twelve o'clock."

"Well—er—I may be able to see Sergeant Bates and perhaps you again. I won't take you farther. Wait for me at your desk, will you?"

A distant horseman, trotting swiftly homeward, splashed through the ford at the moment; but long before he reached the gate the colonel had gone on through upon his regular daily tramp, making the rounds of the big wide-spreading post. The young officer, silent and pale, had gone back to his office. The sentry at the gate presented arms as the tall haggard-looking rider came trotting in, sitting very erect and squarely down in the saddle. At the parting of the roads he suddenly reined in and dismounted. "Take him to the stables and get your dinner, Gribble," said he to the trumpeter boy. "I shall not ride again to-day." Then, with grave, anxious, downcast face, went striding up the southward line to his quarters at the farther end—the quarters that had been the Rays'.

On the gallery of Lieutenant Thornton's were two or three young army wives and mothers, who ceased chatting and somewhat curiously studied the coming officer. In brief, absent-minded fashion he lifted his cap and passed them by. Young Dr. Wallen was just coming forth and calling cheerily to them. "Oh, he'll do very nicely now. Miss Sanford handled him admirably;" then, "Oh, beg a thousand pardons, Major," as he bumped sideways into the tall soldier passing by.

"Who's hurt?" asked Dwight with scant interest.

“Why—er—Georgie Thornton got a little—er—gash playing. His mother was scared a bit, and I was coming that way and she called me in. The eye is n’t injured.”

“Why—how’d it happen?”

“Oh, er—well, I don’t know, exactly,” answered Wallen, in deep confusion. “Some boy scrap—mishap—accident, probably, and—er—good-day,” he finished lamely, as he darted off.

Queer, thought Dwight. Is everybody seeking to avoid me? He only vaguely heard, and for the moment gave little heed to, the angry words that followed him from the open doorway. “Ask your boy how it happened, Major Dwight,” for the mother was suffering still, and some natures, suffering, *will* spit and scratch. Not then, but just a little later, as Jimmy came bounding gladly to meet him and to seize his hand, did Dwight remember Mrs. Thornton’s words, and looking down into the joyous, beaming, flushing face, with the big, wide-open, violet eyes, the father questioned:

“What’s this about Georgie Thornton? How was he cut?”

“Georgie? Cut? Why, daddy, I did n’t know it. Is he hurt?”

“You don’t, Jim? Why, they told me to ask you, as though *you* would know. Were n’t you with him?”

“Why, yes, daddy. I—I got out late,” and here the young face began to cloud. “And then—such fun!” and the laughter once more came bubbling joyously from

his happy heart. "Some 'B' Troop horses got loose, and we all ran to see the round-up, and we were hindmost at the start, Georgie and I, but *I* caught 'em, and got there with the foremost, an' I guess he got tired and went home because we ran away from him, really."

But already the father's attention was diverted. His eyes were following Stanley Foster, who, dancing lightly down the steps, waved his hand with exuberant cordiality to the pair as he crossed the road and struck out over the parade.

"When that fellow begins putting his hand on my shoulder or patting my back or calling me old chap I know he's playing to 'do' me some way," once said a brother officer of Foster's, and Sandy Ray was thinking of it when three minutes later Foster came bounding breezily in, confidence, cordiality, and jovial good-fellowship beaming from his well-groomed visage:

"Sandy, old boy, lend me a horse this afternoon, will you?"

Ray was alone at his desk. The bare little army office, with its few maps and ornamental calendars adorning the unpapered walls, its barrack-built table and chairs, its stacks of letter-files, boxes and tins of samples, was an uninviting place at best, yet had never hitherto appeared inhospitable. Even under the management of the still half-crippled cavalryman, himself an abstainer from the cup that sometimes cheers, and a partaker of a cup that always saddens, there had ever been frank and cor-

dial greeting for visiting comrades, followed usually by invitation to taste the good cheer of the Canteen and suggest, if possible, additional improvement. But it was a lack-luster eye that turned on the entering officer this day. Sergeant Bates had but just left the room after having, in answer to question, briefly stated that no one but Captain Foster had visited the lieutenant's office during church time Sunday. The captain had merely tasted the beer, glanced about him, and then departed. No, not the way he came, the parade side. The captain had looked into the reading-room and through the billiard-room, which latter was closed on account of the day, and had strolled out through the rear doorway, a short cut to the east gate. That, then, seemed to complete the chain of evidence described by the colonel, and the heart of Sandy Ray was seething when Foster bustled in, while his voice, when presently there came reply, was as icily cold. All the same he turned in his revolving chair and looked his visitor straight in the eye, as he arose.

"What do you want him for?"

Foster flushed. He read unerringly the intense dislike in the young officer's gaze, but he dissembled:

"To ride, 'bout four o'clock," was the matter-of-course reply.

"Major Dwight said both his horses were at your disposal. He's only had one out to-day. Is Mrs. Dwight going to ride the other?"

Foster's eyelids shut to a narrow slit. His mustache

began to bristle at the ends. Now the red was flitting and his face was turning sallow.

"While I consider that none of your business, Mr. Ray—yes!"

"Then," said Sandy, his cheek white, his lips set, his eyes aflame, "you can't have mine."

The low hum of voices, the gurgle of laughter drifting through the stove-pipe hole and through the crevices of the pine partition from the lounging-room beyond, seemed to die away almost at the moment. Ray had hardly uplifted his voice. For an instant a silence fell on the facing pair in the Exchange office—the one rather tall, fair, stylishly garbed in the latest civilian fashion; the other short, slender, trimly built, with dark curling hair and snapping black-brown eyes; both men trembling now, but neither dropping an eyelid. Then with clinching fist and fiery eyes the elder took a step forward. He was throwing off the mask. He was speaking angrily, audibly:

"By Heaven, Ray, if I did n't happen to know that you are, or had been, madly in love with Mrs. Dwight, I—I'd consider that an insult."

"Well," came the ready response, "why not so consider it—anyhow?"

In an instant the larger, heavier, stronger man had hurled himself on the slender junior and, one sinewy hand on the back of the neck, the other at the throat, Foster shook him furiously—but only for a second. No sooner

did Ray feel himself seized than he "let go" with both fists, and both fists found their mark on Foster's face—one swing, the right, stinging him on the unguarded jaw. Two more followed in the flash of a second, and Foster, stunned and amazed, dropped his hold and for a second recoiled. In blind fury the next moment he rushed again, Ray springing lightly aside, whirling and sending his right with electric snap square to the already smarting jowl—a blow that staggered yet did not fell the stronger man, the man who even in his rage managed partially, at least, to recover his wits, for as he straightened up he held forth protesting hand and panted: "Stop! Not now. They hear us, and by the God that made me you'll hear from me. You dare to strike—your superior officer!"

"Superior be damned!" shouted Ray, raging for battle and reckless of consequence. "You rank me two grades on the roster, but you're miles behind as a man. Come again, if you dare, you cad!" And like a young bantam the army-bred lad was dancing eagerly about, forgetful of his lameness and watching like a cat his bulky antagonist.

"Not here, I say, nor with blackguard weapons you seem to know how to handle; but—next time we meet, young man—next time!"

"Next time, this time, *any* time!" shouted Ray. "And mind you, you villain, make your will before you meet me!"

“And meantime, Captain Foster,” came the stern commanding words from the threshold, where suddenly stood the colonel, “pack your belongings and quit the post. There, sir,” and significantly he shook an open telegram, “there, sir, are your orders.”

CHAPTER X

A GATHERING STORM

MINNECONJOU that afternoon was the vortex of a revolving storm of sensation, speculation, and excitement. The few men at the Club spoke with bated breath and shrugging shoulders, with hands thrust deep in side pockets and with occasional semi-hysterical giggle. Men at the Canteen retailed in whispers, and with possibly unconscious editorialisms of their own, the story of the encounter at the office as heard through the partition in their own premises. Women along the line of officers' quarters and women among the humbler homes of the married soldiers went flitting from door to door gathering in wide-eyed, gossiping groups,

"For the colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady
Are sisters under their skins."

There were three women, however, prominent in this chronicle and others not individually mentioned, who kept within doors and bounds until the sun was well down behind the Sagamore and the line was formed for parade. Even then Mrs. Dwight did not appear, but Mrs. Ray sat for a while with Sandy on the little veranda, and a very

red-eyed Priscilla went forth, as she said, for needed exercise. Just what had passed between her aunt and herself was never referred to outside of the family. Mrs. Ray, it seems, had also heard the childish wail of distress, had come down to inquire the cause, but not until Priscilla had succeeded in leading the little sufferer home. Then in the hall, probably, Marion had picked up the official batch of papers; thought it something of Sandy's, for open official wrappers of newspaper clippings are not privileged communications and he who runs upon them may read. Presumably Mrs. Ray had read, and, if so, the meekest, mildest of women in her place would have had a rod in pickle for Priscilla when that energetic maiden returned. It had at least one point in favor of Sandy. It relieved him from the necessity of "interviewing" his cousin. But for the life of him Sandy Ray could not be kind or cordial to Priscilla for many a day. She wrote to him, at her aunt's demand, a letter to be shown to the colonel commanding, and a portion of this letter appeared in his returned indorsement. She admitted that the only instance of officers "carousing" with and tempting the men to drink was when Uncle Will took her to see the Canteen and sipped his glass of Rhenish when the sergeants drank his health. "But," was the ingenuous argument, "if Uncle Will, who is so abstemious and conscientious, could do that much, I naturally reasoned that others whom I knew to be neither abstemious nor, in such matters, conscientious, would do infinitely more, and there-

fore considered my statement justifiable in view of the vital importance of the matter under discussion." As to the other points in her allegation, Priscilla had no better or broader foundation. It was one of those instances of "justifiable vericide" wherein many a worthy woman, and man, has soothed a protesting conscience with "the end justifies the means."

But Priscilla had to promise also to write full confession to the *Banner of Light*, and it was sent registered. Aunt Marion saw to that; and duly received but never, even in part, was it published—that would be doing violence to editorial ethics.

At three o'clock that afternoon the colonel's adjutant had called ceremoniously at the quarters of Major Dwight, and at four o'clock the colonel's ambulance had followed. Half a thousand eyes, probably, followed that official vehicle as it whirled away townward, a raging captain of cavalry being the sole occupant of the interior, the driver and an orderly conversing in low tones at the front. Major Dwight had come forth with his guest, escorted him down the steps to the waiting wagon, had ostentatiously shaken hands with him twice—thrice; had even held him in conversation as though reluctant to part, and had then gone stalking over to the colonel's quarters with twitching lips and fingers to demand an explanation of this summary expulsion of his guest. If Captain Foster was to be ordered off the post because of a personal encounter with Lieutenant Ray, what was to

be done with Mr. Ray? was what the major wished to know, and Colonel Stone, instead of snubbing, censuring or sending him back in arrest, went halfway down the steps to meet him, took him by the hand and said, "I've been expecting you, major, and have much to tell you," beckoned the adjutant to follow and led on into an inner room. The post surgeon was also there, by invitation.

"Major Dwight," said Stone, "I have asked these gentlemen to be present as witnesses to what I have to tell you, and if there's any man of your own corps you'd like to have present, my orderly will fetch him at once. No? Then I'll proceed. I assume you wish to know why Captain Foster was formally invited to proceed on his way this afternoon. You fancy, I believe, and he possibly—probably—told you, it was for attacking Lieutenant Ray at the Canteen. It was not. There are several reasons, and the moment I have told you enough I wish you to say stop. I do not like your fr—your guest, but I desire to say no more at his expense than may be absolutely necessary. Do you understand?"

Dwight bowed gravely. "I think I do, sir," was his answer, and the party settled into chairs and for the moment into silence.

Then Stone began again:

"When Captain Foster arrived here he took occasion to tell me he had just dropped in for a day or two—that he was expecting his orders any moment. Connor, lieutenant-colonel commanding the —th, is a classmate of

mine, and in writing me two weeks ago he spoke of the shortage of officers. He said that Foster's application for a month's delay had been negatived by him and that he was then expecting him any moment. Thursday last came another letter. Short as he was of officers, three of his best had been taken away for court-martial duty. Foster's troop was commanded by a sergeant, and going to seed. Foster was apparently lost, for a copy of his order to report without delay had been there a week. His adjutant had wired to Foster's address and got no answer. That evening, as it happened, I met Foster again, and he went out of his way to tell me he could n't imagine what had become of his orders. He had left directions with his home people to open everything that came and wire him here at once, and nothing had come, at least to him. This was queer. Friday he repeated it. That afternoon at the telegraph office in town the operator asked me if a Captain Foster was at the post. Three messages had come for him, two calling for reply, and he had sent by wire, at least, no answer. Two, said the operator, were from New York, saying important orders were there, and what should they do with them? Now, I don't like double dealing, Dwight. I at once wired Connor that his lost captain was found—here—claiming to be without orders. Connor probably wired the War Department, and on Monday noon came this." Saying which, the colonel took from his desk and held forth a telegram, which Dwight solemnly re-

ceived and read, then sat one moment in silence. It was from the War Department, Washington, and as follows:

COMMANDING OFFICER,

Fort Minneconjou.

If Captain Stanley Foster, —th Cavalry, is still at your post notify him that his orders were sent June — to his address, New York City. Secwar directs that he proceed at once to Fort Wister and report to his regimental commander for duty. Acknowledge receipt and report action.

“Secwar” being the official telegraphic abbreviation for Secretary of War, that order was beyond appeal. Without a word Dwight carefully refolded the message, arose, and handed it to the post commander. Then, after a moment's pause, straightening up, he spoke.

“I have been wrong, sir, and I—beg your pardon. I, too, had been led to suppose he was awaiting orders. Moreover, he led me to suppose his virtual expulsion was due to his resenting insulting language from Lieutenant Ray. I—will you?—have I your permission, sir, to be absent from parade and the post this evening?”

The surgeon bent quickly forward, his eyes on Stone. The colonel started, faltered, then, pulling himself together, arose, once more extended his hand, which Dwight took mechanically, and then, after a moment's reflection, spoke:

“Major Dwight, I have the highest respect for you as a soldier and as a man, but I ask you to withdraw

that request. Frankly, sir, it is my desire that you do not quit the post—to-night."

A moment later when the door had closed upon the tall, spare, almost angular form, the colonel mopped his brow and said: "If I let that man go he'll follow Foster to the station and throttle him—he so hates a liar and a lie."

"I thought Foster got away in time for the Flyer," said the doctor, after a pause. He had been intently watching Dwight's every move and gesture.

"In plenty of time," answered the colonel, "though he planned it otherwise, and don't know it even now. He was scheming to miss to-day's Overland and so wait until to-morrow, but I sent the adjutant, with a man to help him pack, and the word that the ambulance would call for him at four. He *could* decline the help, but he could n't the ambulance. Now, as luck would have it, they wire me that the Flyer's five hours late."

"If that's the case at Valentine," said the adjutant, "she'll be six behind by the time she strikes Minneconjou."

"Then," said Dr. Waring, "we may not have seen the last of Stanley Foster. Is Ray, too, confined to the post?"

"No," said the colonel, "I had n't thought about that at all."

CHAPTER XI

DEEPER IN THE TOILS

DRESS parade went off that evening in somewhat perfunctory fashion. Even the alert and soldierly adjutant had a preoccupied air. Stone rejoiced in his three battalions, as they really were—the cavalry squadron consisting, like the infantry units, of four companies—and ordinarily loved to hold them quite a while at the manual, and later for the march past. This evening he ordered but a few casual shifts and dispensed entirely with the review. Almost every piazza had its little group of spectators. The walk was lined with visitors, the roadway with vehicles from town, and Stone had never seemed to notice them. What he did notice was that Dwight, standing stark and alone in front of the center of his squadron, began swaying before the sergeant's reports were rendered, and was obviously faint and ill. It was on his account entirely that Stone curtailed the stately ceremony, and thereby disappointed spectators. He took the major by the arm and walked with him to his door and left him there with promise to send the surgeon without delay. Dwight declared the doctor unnecessary, but thanked most earnestly his commanding officer. A pert young

woman in cap and ribbons met them at the threshold with the information that Madame had partaken of a *tisane* and begged that she might not be intruded upon, as it was Dr. Wallen's mandate that she should sleep, if a possible thing. Stone looked queerly, sharply, at her and turned away. The major made no reply to her remarks, but desired that Master James be sent to him as soon as he returned. It seems that Jimmy had accompanied Sergeant French, a keen angler, to a trout stream up in the Sagamore Range early in the afternoon. It might be late before they returned. "Lucky thing, that!" thought the colonel, as he hastened homeward to lay aside his full uniform, the orderly, meantime, speeding over to the post surgeon's.

"What do you make of him?" asked the colonel, an hour later, as the senior medical officer came lumbering up the steps.

"He seems, physically, all right now," was the answer. "There is no functional disorder. He's sound as a dollar as far as our tests can determine, but Dwight has been under a strain, as we know, and then—there's that Luzon sunstroke. Any time, almost, that may lead to such symptoms as you noted at parade."

"Lucky Dwight is n't a drinking man," said Stone grimly. "There won't be any more *Banner of Light* descriptions of our depravity for a time, anyhow; but—fancy the story *that* would make in expert hands—and a Prohibition sheet. God grant no worse scandal come

to us," he added piously, and in guarded tone, as the surgeon took his leave.

It was barely nine o'clock when, some garrison callers having departed, Mrs. Stone picked up a light wrap and said she believed she would stroll down the line and see Mrs. Ray. Everybody by this time had heard of the fracas at the office of the post Exchange at noonday, and the few who had caught sight of the left side of Foster's face bore testimony to the fact that Sandy Ray had lost little, if any, of one science he picked up at the Point. Mrs. Ray would surely be feeling anxious and distressed, said Mrs. Stone, even though everyone assured her, in manner if not in words, that public sympathy was all with Sandy.

"I believe I'll go, too," said Stone. "I'm feeling woozy to-night." So, arm in arm, this Darby and Joan of the frontier betook themselves down the row, past many an open casement and doorway, softly lighted, with whispering couples in the shadows and laughing, chatting groups upon the steps, with the tinkle of mandolin and guitar to mingle with the soft murmur of voices, despite many a hospitable bid to "Come and join us," the couple kept sturdily on and found, just as they expected, that other sympathetic souls had been before them, that Mrs. Ray was still holding quite a reception, Priscilla and Sandy being conspicuous by their absence, Priscilla having retired with a throbbing headache, Sandy, still tingling and nervous, having sent for his

horse but a short time before and gone for a ride. They stayed quite a while, did the Stones, and Mrs. Ray seemed gladdened and comforted by their coming. It meant so much just then. Indeed, the bugles were sounding the ten o'clock call when finally they took their leave, and Sandy had not returned. True, he had then been gone little over an hour, and he could ride but slowly, though he declared he had neither strained a muscle nor started anew the trouble in the old wound. Perhaps it was too soon to be sure, but at all events a ride, a gentle amble on a nimble, easy horse over the elastic turf in the soft, summer moonlight would soothe and quiet him more than anything else, so, wisely, Marion had interposed no objection.

Taps sounded and the lights were lowered in the barracks and the sentries called off half-past ten o'clock, and still there had come no sign of the westbound Flyer, far over the southward waves of prairie, slowly breasting the long upgrade to the Pass. The big compound engine of the Midland Pacific had a deep-toned, melodious, flute-like signal, utterly different to the ear-piercing shriek of the old-fashioned railway whistle, and on still evenings the sharp, rhythmical beat of the exhaust, the steady rumble of the heavy Pullmans, and the occasional blast, rich and mellow, of the misnamed whistle could be followed westward for many a mile, until at last the echoes of the signal died away among the cliffs and cañons of the frowning Sagamore.

Some distance out across the rolling prairie, a mile or more beyond the Minneconjou, was the siding of a deserted station, once built there by the quartermaster's department with the idea of making a much shorter haul for supplies than that afforded by the broad and fairly level road from town. The wear and tear on mules, harness and running gear consequent upon the up-hill and down-dale character of the road, and the unprecedented volume of blasphemy supposedly necessary to successful fording of the Minneconjou, within earshot of the pious-minded at the post, led to eventual abandonment of that route in favor of the far longer but undeniably safer line to Silver Hill. It was a fine sight on clear evenings to see the long trail of electric lights gleaming white against the darkness, come rounding a distant bluff to the east, and then, skirting for a mile or so the south bank of the Minneconjou, go alternately burrowing and bridging the prairie divides and hollows until finally lost behind the sharp spur known as Two-Mile Ridge. The Flyer had a way of waiting at Omaha for the last of the express trains of five great railways bringing their loads from Chicago and St. Louis, all scheduled to reach Council Bluffs about the same hour, and some one or more of them being frequently behind. The Midland could make up no time between the Missouri and the Minneconjou, so light was the roadbed, so heavy the traffic, so many the stops. It was not until beyond the Sagamore the Flyer began to deserve its name. Due at Silver Hill

this year of which we write as early as 5:30, the Flyer not infrequently stopped for supper as late as eleven, and not until eleven this night did the sentry on the southward front hear the big compound tooting for the crossings at Bonner's Bluff, and see the long line of electrics come gleaming into view far down the eastward valley.

Private O'Shea, sentry on No. 3, overlooking the flats whereon stood the stables, was straining his ears to catch the expected call of eleven o'clock from No. 2, and watching the distant trail of lights, and was able to say next morning that the Flyer was just shoving its nose behind Two-Mile Ridge as the second call, that of eleven o'clock, started round. The moon in its first quarter, though bright and clear, was then dipping low in the west and objects were by no means as distinct as they had been when he came on post soon after nine and saw Lieutenant Ray set forth, mounted, up the Minneconjou. O'Shea remembered that Hogan, who took care of the lieutenant's horse, had come back across his post, and they had had a brief talk about him, Hogan saying the lieutenant was n't half satisfied with having blackened the eyes of a bigger man. "He was that savage and snappy he rowed me for keeping him so long waiting, when, dear knows, he could n't have stood at the back gate ten minutes." O'Shea owned that he and Hogan, "all the fellers, for that matter," had wished their little bantam of a canteen officer could have had two minutes

more at "the big feller." Foster had no friends among the enlisted men at the fort. It presently became a question whether or no he had not enemies. Hogan was just saying the lieutenant told him not to sit up for him when they became aware of someone approaching, heard the rattle of a sword, and saw the officer of the guard barely forty yards away, whereat Hogan skipped for the stables. Then came the next important point in O'Shea's statement. Just as the tail lights of the big train disappeared behind the ridge he heard the sudden single blast of the whistle sounding the old-time signal "down-brakes," noted the instant change from the loud, pulsing exhaust to the scream of escaping steam, heard even the squeal and grind of the tightly clamped wheels as the Flyer slowed down to a standstill. He was wondering what had happened when the third relief came round and Private Schmitz took his place on post, as subsequently he replaced Shea on the stand.

Schmitz was an honest Teuton, but by no means brilliant. Schmitz told a straightforward tale, and one that had strange and significant bearing on the case that became presently of paramount interest at Minneconjou. Schmitz said that he heard the train going on westward after the relief had disappeared, and that, just after the call of 11:30, he walked way up to the far end of his post, the west end, came slowly back, and when about in rear of Lieutenant Ray's quarters he heard a sort of cough down the slope toward the stables and saw a dark form

approaching. He challenged in low tone, as he had been taught. The answer was, "Officer of the post," and before he could think how to say, "Advance and be recognized," the officer said, "Lieutenant Ray, sentry," and went on without stopping. When asked to describe the officer, Schmitz said the moon was then "owudt" and it was pretty dark, but it was a "leetle, schmall gentleman. He walk and talk and look yust like Lieutenant Ray effrey day does." Questioned as to the dress, he said the lieutenant wore his "kempyne hat bulled down ofer his eyes—his blue blouse mid shoulder straps, poots unt bants." He added that, though the officer had n't come nearer him than fifteen feet, if it was n't Lieutenant Ray, who was it? Schmitz stood pat on this proposition, and that was all that could be elicited from him, except that the Herr Lieutenant had gone through the back gate to his quarters.

About the same hour the telephone in the quartermaster's office, the only telephone the United States would permit or, at least, pay for at the post, set up a sharp ringing, that finally roused from his heavy slumber a veteran employee serving as clerk. Shuffling to the instrument in his slippers, the clerk desired to be informed what in sheol Silver Hill wanted waking people that hour of the night? The reply was a question. The Argenta's livery stableman wished to know if anything had been seen of a horse and buggy of his at the fort. A gent had hired one just about dark, said he, a

gent who said he'd be back about ten, and who had n't come. The gent had had supper in his room at the Argenta and had ordered his traps sent to the railway station to meet the Flyer. They said at the hotel office that he was a Captain Foster, whereat the clerk became interested, notified the stableman that he would make immediate inquiry at the guard-house, and did, and the guard said that neither Foster nor his buggy had been seen about the post. The clerk was beginning to dribble this through the 'phone, when he was suddenly cut off by the counter announcement: "Oh, it's all right! The rig's just back. Cap took the Flyer west and sent a boy home with it. Never even got change for the ten dollars he deposited."

But when mine host of the Argenta came back from seeing the Flyer off for the west he, too, had questions to ask as to Foster. Did the office clerk see anything of him? Nothing. "Queer," said boniface, "we gave his hand baggage to the Pullman porter, as directed, but his trunk is there yet. Reckon I'll have to wire after him and tell the conductor to send them things back by No. 5."

And this, before he went to bed, the landlord proceeded to do, but no Captain Foster appeared during the night to claim the trunk or remonstrate about the luggage; nor came there any answer to the dispatch to the Flyer until the following morning, when there was handed the proprietor a slip somewhat as follows:

Man calling himself Captain Foster put aboard last night at Fort Siding, slugged and robbed. Taking him on to Wister. Physician in charge. Better notify police.

This was about eight o'clock, at which time the old guard was cleaning up about the guard-house and the companies detailed for the new were assembling in front of their quarters, and the officer of the guard, a young lieutenant recently joined from civil life, new to his trade and strange to the traditions of the army, was cross-questioning a reluctant corporal about an unauthorized item of equipment found tucked into his cartridge belt when the guard paraded at reveille—an officer's gauntlet of the style worn in the cavalry a year before this time. The corporal explained that it had been picked up by No. 3 just before his relief was taken off post at 5:15, that it had been handed him, the corporal, just before sentry's shout of "Turn out the guard!" at the approach of the officer of the day, and he had stowed it there for want of a better place and before he had had time to examine it.

But No. 3, it seems, had *had* time to examine, and had told some of his mates of his discovery. They had gone to Corporal Clancy to see for themselves, and had been told to go about their business, which led to more talk that finally reached the lieutenant's ears. Clancy had had a clatter with the sergeant and had been refused permission to go to his quarters anywhere, for a strange story was flitting about the post concerning two or three

men of "B" Troop who had been out late the previous night, had got liquor over at a vile resort far across the Minneconjou, and a little southwest of town, and had had a sanguinary fight of some kind, for Sullivan was badly cut and Connelly had a nasty eye, and there was something black and ugly back of it they were trying to hide, unless veteran sergeants were in error; and finally the sergeant of the guard told the lieutenant of the story and said he believed Corporal Clancy was secreting evidence that might be of value, whereupon Clancy was ordered into the presence and told to produce that gauntlet.

But neither lieutenant nor sergeant dreamed of what was before them when Clancy at last reluctantly complied, dragging from beneath his blouse what had been a dainty bit of military finery, a soft white gauntlet, that bore within the cuff the inscription, "Sanford Ray," and that without was soaked and stained with blood.

CHAPTER XII

WHAT THE WOMEN TOLD THE MAJOR

IT was another lovely summer morning, sweet, moist and still. The squadron had been out as usual, but the drill had been anything but snappy or spirited. Every officer knew, and most men decided, that something was weighing heavily on the major's mind, for, though he labored conscientiously through his duties, comments and corrections were few, and, to the surprise of all, he even dismissed the troops some few minutes before the sounding of the recall. Captain Washburn looked back over his shoulder at the tall, spare, sinewy figure riding slowly, even dejectedly, with downcast eyes and troubled visage, back toward the big quarters at the end of the row, and shook his own head as he marveled what would be the outcome of all this foreboding. Minneconjou had breathed freer, for all its subdued chatter, over the elimination of Captain Foster from the column of probabilities. Minneconjou had seen little of the lovely Mrs. Dwight of late, for though she appeared at every dance, several dinners and on many a drive, few women had speech with her, thanks to Foster's incessant supervision, and, looking at another woman without unlimited conversation is not

“seeing” her as understood in feminine society. Since Foster’s departure the previous day only the doctor and the maid had been admitted to the presence of Mrs. Dwight, though there had been callers with “kind inquiries.” It was now time for guard-mounting and the busy routine of another day. One after another prettily gowned matrons and maids began to appear on the verandas and flit from door to door, and the band marched forth and took its station on the parade and the details were being inspected by the sergeants in front of their quarters, while, well over toward the west end of the big quadrilateral, a dozen army-bred lads of various ages, from fourteen down to five, were gleefully surrounding a pair of Indian ponies recently bought for the doctor’s twin boys. Prominent in the group, Jimmy Dwight, ever a prime favorite, was bestriding the more promising of the pair, a wall-eyed, surly-looking pinto, and, as perhaps the most accomplished horseman in the lot, was trying to make the unwilling brute show his paces, a thing that only an Indian, as a rule, can successfully do. Officers on their way to their company duty stopped to see the fun. The adjutant paused before signaling to the drum major and said a laughing word of caution to the merry crowd, lest their gleeful shouts and laughter should disturb the dignity of the coming ceremony. The senior surgeon, coming forth from his quarters, Silver Hill’s morning journal just received, open in his hand, moved an adjournment to the rear of

the administration building. But the colonel himself, likewise provided by a rushing newsboy with a fresh copy of our morning contemporary, sallied forth from his gate and shouted encouragement to the plucky little rider. "Stick to him, Jimmy boy, and you others don't yell so; keep quiet, and the pony will tire of kicking."

Then he and the doctor fell into converse over the telegraphic headline, and then the bugles pealed adjutant's call, the band crashed merrily into "Hands Across the Sea," and the details of the twelve companies came marching jauntily forth upon the green. The colonel, with soldierly appreciation in his eyes, stood watching the sharp, snappy formation of the line, the paper dangling unheeded from his thumb and forefinger, while the surgeon, more alive to the news of the day than the niceties of military duty, turned over the outer page, began to scan the headlines of the inner column, as suddenly, impulsively, unthinkingly startled the colonel by the exclamation "God!" Stone whirled about in sudden anxiety. For a moment the doctor simply stared and read, then glanced at the post commander, and, without a word, handed him the sheet. Stone, too, stared, started, looked quickly into the surgeon's face, and then said: "Let's get inside." So together these veterans of their respective corps quit the field and the sight of men and boys and went to confer within the depth of the vine-shaded veranda.

At that same moment the tall, gaunt form of Major Dwight was seen to issue from the front doorway of the first quarters on the southward line, the field officer's roomy house, and, looking neither to the right nor the left, straight, stern and rigidly erect, he strode forth upon the grassy parade, heading for the merry group about the ponies. The band had ceased its spirited march music. The adjutant had assigned officers and non-commissioned officers to their posts. The lieutenant commanding had ordered "Inspection arms!" and once again the strain of sweet music swept across the green carpeted quadrangle, and Marion Ray, seated on her piazza far down the line, chatting with a neighbor who had just dropped in, lifted her head and listened. It was one of Margaret's old favorites, a song she used to sing and loved to sing, a song played by many an army band for many a year, and it seemed never to grow wearisome or stale—"Happy Be Thy Dreams." With her thoughts all of Margaret and her eyes following her thoughts, she arose; stepped to the rail, looking for little Jim, whom she had recently seen but seldom, and then caught sight of the major a long distance away, bearing straight and swift upon the romping group at the westward end of the parade. Barely twenty minutes before, as she was giving Sandy his coffee, for Sandy had come down late after a restless, almost sleepless night, she had heard Dwight's deep tones at the front gate in earnest conversation with Priscilla, who now

had entirely disappeared. More than once of late the two had been in talk over some of Priscilla's schemes, but the housemaid said she thought Miss Sanford had gone now with the major down the row, perhaps to Lieutenant Thornton's. Why should they go thither? Priscilla had been so very silent, subdued and, it was hoped, contrite since the exposure of her correspondence with the *Banner* that Mrs. Ray marveled at her early resumption of the old dominant way; for, though low-voiced and almost reluctant, for her, Priscilla's words to the major had been spoken firmly, unflinchingly. Only two or three of these words had reached the ears of her aunt; the others were not sufficiently loud or articulate, but whatever they were, they had led to immediate action, for the major had departed, Priscilla with him, and, anxiously, inspired partially by the music, partially by some indefinable sense of something going sadly amiss, something that should be stopped at once, Marion stepped forward, gazed eastward down the row and saw Priscilla in close conversation with little Mrs. Thornton, only five doors away, and then, all in a flash, she remembered——

Sandy, before starting for his office, had gone back to his room. He at least was on hand and ready to act in case she needed him, but as yet she did not call. Forgetful, for the moment, of her visitor, she stood clasping the rail and staring, inert and even possibly fascinated, along the westward line, following intently and with startled, troubled eyes the major's movements. Others,

too, had noted both among the spectators along that front and among the laughing lads themselves. By this time the ponies had been favored with new riders and the riders with every conceivable suggestion as to what to attempt. Jimmy had given place to Harold Winn, and rejoicefully was bidding him clamp tighter with his legs and knees and keep his hands down on the withers, but too late. A sudden lunge with his heels, a dive with his shaggy head, and the spunky little brute, half-savage as a result of all-savage training, had propelled his would-be conqueror sprawling to the edge of the gleaming waters of the *acequia*, and a shout of mingled delight and derision went up from a dozen boy throats, and Jimmy, helping his playmate, unhurt but shaken, to his feet, caught sight of the loved form speeding toward them over the green, and, bubbling over with fun, laughter, high health and spirits, just as of old went bounding joyously, confidently, to meet him.

Of just what was passing in Oswald Dwight's bewildered mind that morning God alone could judge and tell. All his soldier life he had loved truth and hated a lie. All his fond and confident teaching of his only boy, Margaret's darling and his hope and pride, had been to speak the truth, frankly, fearlessly, fully, first, last and all the time. "Never fear to come to me with anything you may have done. Never let anything tempt you to swerve from the truth and the whole truth. Nothing you can ever say or do will ever so hurt me as will a lie." And

so, fearlessly and fully, from the time Jim had begun to prattle he had learned to own his little faults, sure of sympathy and forgiveness. He had learned to strive to conquer them for the sake of the love and trust that was so unfailing, and in response to the grave but ever gentle admonition, and it had been the father's fond belief for years that between him and his only son there lived utter confidence and faith, that Jim would ever shrink from a lie and never from him. Between the two, father and son, never had there seemed to come a shadow, until of late that darkly beautiful face had for the time, at least, replaced—that other. Since then, time and again when Dwight spoke of his pride and trust in Jim, the new wife had listened, unresponsive. Since that last night in Naples, whenever Dwight spoke of his confidence in Jimmy's word she had sometimes looked up appealingly, timidly, as though she longed to believe as he believed, yet could not—quite. Sometimes she had looked away. Once or twice she had ventured a faint negation. Jimmy would not *deliberately* tell a falsehood; oh, she was *sure* of that, but, like all children, she said, when suddenly accused, the impulse would be to deny, would it not? and then—had not the major observed?—did he not remember—that Jimmy was just a bit—imaginative? Dwight puzzled over her apparent unbelief.

But very recently he had noticed other little things that vaguely worried him. Could it be that, as his boy grew older and mingled more with other boys, he was

learning to be influenced more by them and less by the father? Could it be that he was seeing, hearing, things, to speak of which he dared not? There might be things of which he would be ashamed. Certainly the father had seen at times, since the homeward voyage, a certain hesitancy on part of the son, and within the past few days, for the first time in Jimmy's life, Dwight had noted symptoms of something like avoidance, concealment, embarrassment, *something* that told his jealous, over-anxious heart the boy no longer utterly confided in the man. It was late the previous evening when the little fellow had returned with his stanch friend, Sergeant French, and a fine string of trout, happy, radiant, proud of his success, but so tired he could hardly keep his eyes open long enough to undress and get to bed. Dwight had met him at the door, cautioning silence on mamma's account, and the young face that beamed up at his, all delight and eagerness at first, clouded almost instantly at the word. Jimmy did not even care for the tempting supper set aside for him—he had had such a big lunch, he said, in smothered tone, as he prattled eagerly to his father and showed his finny prizes, and sipped at his glass of milk. But Dwight had been brooding over little things that had come to him since Foster's assisted emigration. He had returned straight from his conference with Stone and the surgeon to find Inez reduced to the sofa and smelling salts—to tell her at once that their guest was gone, not because of a fracas with Ray, as

Foster had furiously declared, but because of telegraphic orders from Washington that had come, possibly, as the result of Foster's own telegraphic inquiries of Saturday and Sunday. Not for a star would Dwight let his wife suppose that Foster's protracted visit had given him the least uneasiness! But the maid, that pert and flippant young person so much in evidence about the house, so indispensable to Inez, so intangibly a nuisance to him, kept flitting in and out, with her persistent, "Madame should compose herself"; "Madame should not try to talk."

The "young person's" nationality, Dwight believed, was Swiss-Italian, rather than French. They had picked her up in Milan, but her professional interests, it seems, were advanced by the adoption of French methods and mannerisms. She had early striven to establish herself as companion rather than maid, to be called *Mademoiselle* rather than *Félicie*, but the dragoon had sharply drawn the line, and in the beginning, at least, the man was master. As ills accumulated, however, and masculine strength deferred to feminine weakness, he succumbed to their wishes, with the result that the ascendancy of the domestic was becoming a matter of gossip. Once established at the post, *Félicie's* swift methods of acquiring knowledge of all that was going on about her, and unlimited means of imparting the same to her mistress, had quite speedily established confidential relations to which the putative master of the house was a

stranger. There is a garrison "Service of Security and Information" that differs widely from that of the field—and is even more comprehensive.

Félicie had heard the various versions of the affray at Ray's office. Félicie had heard of the lamentable affair of Georgie Thornton's injury and its cause, and Félicie had been quick to see and suggest how this incident might be utilized in case Master James could not be persuaded to forget that, when he came hurrying in from church the previous day, mamma, who had been too ill to arise at ten o'clock, was in most becoming morning toilet *tête-à-tête* with Captain Foster in the parlor. Félicie had even assured Madame that she could and would influence Master James accordingly, and this, too, after one unsuccessful attempt on Sunday. Félicie had fairly flown, all sympathy and helpfulness, to fetch Master James fresh, cool water, towels, ice for the back of his neck, a preventive the most assured for nose-bleed, and all this despite Jimmy's repellent silence, for the lad shrank from her instinctively. She had then striven to coax him to promise that he would mention to no man that mamma was dressed and downstairs: it would so annoy the doctor, who had said she should remain in bed, and, indeed, she (Félicie) and the dear captain had remonstrated with mamma, and were even then striving to persuade mamma to return to her room, as later she had to when—Master James came so hurriedly in. The only response had been a blank look of

bewilderment and dislike and an uncompromising: "Well, 'spose somebody *asks* me?"

All this, of course, was known at the moment only to the three; but, as luck would have it, when Dwight came walking slowly homeward from church with Mrs. Ray, communion service ended, Jim had run to meet them, the nose-bleed already forgotten, and, to the father's, "I hope you did n't disturb mamma, my boy. She was trying hard to sleep," the little man had promptly, impulsively responded: "No, indeed, daddy, mamma is up and dressed——" And then he remembered, faltered, blushed.

Dwight did not question his boy about his new mamma. That was another thing from which the father shrank. He saw the lad's sudden confusion, and knew that something was being held back, but it was something that should be held back. In all his teachings as to utter frankness, truth, confidence, he, of course, had never meant that his boy should be a tale-bearer—above all that he should ever come with tales of his new mamma; yet Dwight, unfortunately, had never given him to understand that there were matters, now that the boy was growing older and observant, concerning which no confidences were expected or invited. But it had set him to thinking—to questioning Inez as to her sudden recovery, and again, more pointedly that Monday afternoon between the hour of his visit with the colonel and his ominous symptoms at parade, thereby bringing on a

fit of nerves for her and a swimming of the head for himself. It was while he was waiting for Jimmy's homecoming that Félicie—ostentatiously bustling to and fro, all sympathy for Madame in her prostration and anxiety as to M'sieu, the Commandant—had contrived to intimate that Monsieur James had been so imprudent as to rush, all ensanguined, into the presence of Madame, and now and under such circumstances, and in virgin modesty, Félicie's eyelids drooped, "Madame should be spared all possibility of shock or emotion." Under any other circumstances with what a thrill would he have listened to her words! Did not Monsieur conceive? And Madame's heart and sympathies so all-responsive! Had they not already been lacerated by the story of the suffering of the little George, an infant, oh, heaven, the most amiable! But assuredly Monsieur James had apprised his father of all that had taken place. He, too, was an infant the most amiable, and Dwight, overwrought and bewildered, before Jimmy went to his bed that night, had again asked him what all this meant about Georgie Thornton, and, looking squarely into his father's face, with Margaret's soul speaking from his clear, unflinching, fearless eyes, the little man had said again, "Why, daddy, I have n't an idea! I did n't even *hear* he was hurt until you told me."

Then had come a morning's drill following an almost sleepless night, and during drill he had rebuked young Thornton for the faults of his platoon, and after

drill had lectured him a bit for seeming neglect or indifference, and even of sullen acceptance of deserved criticism. Then, suddenly, remembering, he ceased his rebuke, turned the subject and asked how was George, and then as they were parting, again asked how it happened, and was again startled by the words: "Ask your own boy, sir," for Thornton, like many an older, stronger, wiser man, accepted unchallenged the views of his wife. Jim had had his breakfast and was gone by the time Dwight reached home, but Félicie, in answer to question, with infinite regret and becoming reluctance owned that Miss Sanford and other witnesses of the unfortunate affair united in saying that Monsieur James had, in a moment of boyish petulance perhaps, swung his jacket full in the face of Monsieur George, never thinking, doubtless, of the cruel, sharp-edged, metal button that should so nearly cut out the eye; and then, terrified at the sight of so much blood, was it not natural that any child should run from the sight and try to forget, and perhaps *might* forget, and so deny?

Dwight listened in a daze, spurning the toothsome breakfast set before him; then, rising, took his cap, left the house without another word and, hastening thither, found Priscilla Sanford on the veranda at the Rays'.

As she herself subsequently admitted to her aunt, Priscilla, who had been bred to the doctrine of original sin and innate propensity for evil, who had long thought that the major stood sorely in ignorance as to Jimmy's

spiritual needs, and who herself stood solemnly convinced of the truth of the Thornton story, now conceived it her duty to fully and unreservedly answer the major's questions. Had she witnessed the affair? She had in great part, she said, little considering that of the most essential part, the actual blow or slash, she had seen nothing. Was it true that his son was—the assailant? Priscilla answered that, though she was not at that instant where she could herself *see* the blow, she an instant later saw everything, and the relative position of the boys was such that there was no room for doubt it was James who struck. She heard the scream when near the door and at once ran out. And had not Jimmy stopped to offer aid or—do anything? No, Jimmy had rushed on as though bent on overtaking the leaders, as though he never heard what, much farther away, she had heard distinctly. And then Priscilla owned that the look of agony in the father's face was such that her resolution well-nigh failed her.

But, unhappily, not quite. There are possibly no people so possessed with the devil of meddling in the management of other people's children as those who never had any, or else have been phenomenal failures in the rearing of their own. Dwight asked her presently to go with him to the Thorntons', which she did, beginning to tremble now as her eyes studied his face. Mrs. Thornton was on the veranda. Young hopeful, with bandaged forehead, was blissfully chasing a little terrier pup about

the yard. She, too, began to tremble; the little wrath and resentment left was oozing from her finger tips as Dwight lifted his cap from the lined and haggard brow and she saw the infinite trouble in his deep-set eyes. But he gave her no time to speak.

“I have come,” he said, “to express my deep sorrow at what I must now believe my son has done. I should have come before had—had——” He stumbled miserably. Then, with sudden effort, “I will see Mr. Thornton and make my acknowledgments later, and see the doctor, but first——” Then abruptly he bent, caught Georgie by an arm, lifted the bandage just enough to see the adhesive plaster underneath, muttered something under his breath, dropped his hand by his side, looked appealingly one instant in Priscilla’s eyes as though he would ask one more question, never heeding, perhaps never hearing, Mrs. Thornton’s: “Oh, Major, I’m sure Jimmy could not have meant it!” Womanlike, all vehemence in accusation at first, all insistence in extenuation now that vengeance threatened. The next moment Dwight was gone, and Priscilla dare not follow the first impulse of her heart to run home and tell Aunt Marion and Sandy, or to run after him. She saw the major turn stiffly in at his own gate, far up the row, saw Aunt Marion come forth, and, like guilty things, the maiden of mature years, the mother of immature mind, held there, shrinking, not knowing what to look for—what to do. They, too, saw Dwight come forth again; but none of the anxious eyes along

that anxious line had witnessed what had befallen in the few minutes Dwight spent in presence of his wife. That was known, until some days later, only to Félicie.

She was still abed, sipping her chocolate, and looking but a shade lighter, when he abruptly entered. She could almost have screamed at sight of his twitching face, but he held up warning hand.

"Just a moment, Inez. You had come home—you were on the veranda, I believe; did you see—anything of that—that trouble among the boys yesterday?"

She had seen nothing. She was listening at the moment with downcast lids and heaving bosom to Foster's eager, hurried words. She had heard the shouts of merriment, and faintly heard the screams, and had not even looked to see the cause, but Félicie had found no inapt pupil. Inez buried her face in her jeweled hands. Under the filmy veiling of her dainty nightdress Dwight could see the pretty shoulders beginning to heave convulsively. Was she sobbing? Stepping closer, he repeated the question. "I *must* know," said he.

"Ah, Oswald—how—how can I? You love him so! You love him so much more than—me, and he—he hates me! He shrinks from me! He would not shrink from—poisoning you—against me!"

"Inez, this is childish! Tell me at once what you know—why you—distrust him?"

Again the sobs, the convulsive shoulder-heaving before she would speak, and, as though fired with wrath

inexpressible, Dwight started for the door. Then she called him. Félicie was there, all distress, anxiety, concern for Madame. Indeed, Monsieur should refrain—at such a time, and then there were two to talk, each supplementing—reminding the other. It was true that little Monsieur James could not seem to respond to the love of his young mother, this angel, and he was rude and insolent to Félicie, who adored him, and he—he so hurt and distressed Captain Foster, who was goodness itself to him. It was for rudely, positively contradicting the captain she, Inez, had been compelled to send James to his room and require him to remain there until his father's return, not thinking how long the father would be gone on his visit to town, and even then James was obstinate; he would not apologize, although she had striven, and Félicie, too, to make him understand how his father would grieve that the son he so loved could so affront his guest; and they feared, they feared James deceived sometimes his noble father. The Naples incident was brought up again, and Jimmy's odd insistence that an officer had spoken to and frightened her, and then—those little things he had told on the homeward voyage (Heaven knows how true they were!) and then, oh, it wrung their hearts to see the father's grief, but when Jimmy denied all knowledge of the injury to Georgie Thornton, they knew and Jimmy knew—he *must* have known—it was his own doing. Leaving them both in tears, the father flung himself from the room and down

the stairs, and with his brain afire went straightway in search of his son. Good God! To think that, after all his years of hope and prayer and faith and pride—of careful teaching and utter trust—that it should come to this, that the boy on whom his great heart was centered should after all—after all prove a coward and a liar! His eyes seemed clouded. He saw only as through a lurid glass. The sunlight in the crisp, delicious air was clear as crystal, yet there was a blur that seemed to overshadow every object. There was a ringing in his ears that dulled the sweet strains of the song his wife, his own wife, his love, his treasure, Jimmy's mother, used to sing, for now he never heard it. His temples throbbed; his head seemed burning, yet the face was ashen. The twitching lips, bitten into gashes, were blue between the savage teeth marks, and yet at sight of the straight, soldierly form he loved, little Jim had quit his fellows and, to the music of his mother's song—just as of old, beaming, joyous, confident, brimming over with fun and health—had come bounding to meet him.

It had been the father's way at such times to halt, to bend forward with outstretched arms, almost as he had done in Jimmy's earliest toddling baby boyhood, but he never halted now. Erect and stern he moved straight on. It was the boy who suddenly faltered, whose fond, happy, radiant face grew suddenly white and seemed to cloud with dread, whose eager bounding ceased as he neared his sire, and, though the hands as of old went

forth to clasp the hand that never yet had failed them, for the first time in his glad young life Jimmy Dwight looked in vain for the love and welcome that had ever been his, for the first time his brave young heart well-nigh ceased its beating, for the first time he seemed to shrink from his father's gaze.

And in fear, too, but not for himself; oh, never for himself! Vaguely, strangely, of late he had begun to feel that all was not well with the father he so loved, and now the look in his father's face was terrible. "Oh, daddy!" he cried, a great sob welling up in his throat, but the answering word checked him instantly, checked his anxious query, turned his dread at the instant into relief, almost into joy. It was not then that his father was ill and stricken. It was that he was angry—angry, and at him, and in the flash of a second, in that one hoarse word—"Home!" he knew what it must be, and though his lips quivered and his eyes filled and again the sobs came surging from his breast, just as of old, all confidence that his word could not be questioned, he strove to find his father's hand, even as homeward now, with Inez and her hellcat of a handmaid peeping trembling through the slats, the father striding, the little fellow fairly running before, the two went hurrying on, and Jimmy, looking back, found tongue, and his one thought found words:

"Oh, daddy, indeed I was n't—impudent to Captain Foster—to mamma, at least, I did n't mean it! They

were there in the parlor when I ran in from church, and he wanted me to promise——”

And then Marion Ray, far down the line, with one cry for Sandy, sprang forward to the gate, for Oswald Dwight, with heavy hand, had struck his little son across the face and stretched him on the turf.

CHAPTER XIII

WORST DEED OF HIS LIFE

THERE was no one near enough to reach them at the moment. Jimmy was on his feet again in an instant, dazed, half-stunned, breathless, but still unbelieving. Father could not have heard. Father would surely hear; but now the father's hand had seized his arm, and, when the boy again began to gasp his plea, it was almost dragging him across the *acequia*. Blood was beginning to trickle from the corner of the piteous little mouth. There was foam upon the set and livid lips of the man. "Silence! You've lied enough!" was the savage order, as Dwight thrust the boy through the gate. "Not there, sir!" as Jimmy, dumbly striving to show his loyalty, his obedience, his unshaken trust, would have run on up the steps. "To the cellar!" and in fury he pointed to the walk that circled the house, and Jimmy hurried on. They had vanished from sight as Marion Ray, with terror in her eyes, came almost running up the row, Priscilla and Mrs. Thornton staring, speechless and miserable, after her. A lone trooper, an humble private soldier, riding in from the westward gate, had sprung from saddle, thrown the reins over a post and, with consternation in his face, had

started after them. It was young Hogan, faithful henchman of the Rays, still borne on the rolls of Ray's old squadron. They were in the cellar, under the rear of the quarters, when he reached them, and Jimmy's jacket was lying on the floor, while the lad, with streaming, pleading eyes, was looking up in his father's face.

"Your shirt, too, sir!" Dwight ordered, as Hogan came bounding in.

"For the love o' God, Major, don't bate the boy! Sure he never knew he did it, sir. I saw——"

"Out of here, you!" was the furious answer. "Out or I'll——" And in his blind rage the officer grasped the unresisting soldier by the throat and hurled him through the doorway whence he came. "Off with that shirt!" he again shouted, as he turned. It was already almost off. Ah, how white and smooth and firm was that slender, quivering little body, as, for the last time the streaming eyes were imploringly uplifted, the slender arms upraised, the sobbing prayer poured forth only to be heard—only to be heard.

"Face the window! Turn your back, sir!" was the sole answer through the set teeth, while with sinewy hand the father swung a yard-long strip of leather, some discarded stirrup strap the boys had left upon the bench, and poor Hogan, with a cry and curse upon his lips, rushed again to the front in search of aid. One savage swish, one sharp, cruel, crashing snap, one half-stifled, piteous scream, and then the doorway was suddenly dark-

ened, the maddened man was thrust aside, and, breathless, panting, but determined and defiant, Marion Ray had flung herself upon the bent and shrinking child, her fond arms clasping the bared and quivering back to her wildly throbbing heart, her own brave form thrust between her precious charge and the again uplifted scourge. "Jimmy boy, my darling!" she sobbed, as strong and safe and sure she held him. Then, with her blue eyes blazing, she turned on him.

"Oswald Dwight, are you mad?"

Then again the door was darkened as Sandy Ray came limping in. One glance was enough. The strap was wrenched from the father's hand and hurled to the open, empty, black-mouthed furnace. Then both hands were needed, for Dwight, just as on Monday evening at parade, had begun to sway and was groping for support. There was no one to interpose, no one to interfere, when Marion Ray, having at last stilled poor Jimmy's heavy sobbing and bathed his face and hands and helped him to dress, led him unresisting away to her little home, for Madame "in her condition"—as Félicie explained individually to the dozen men and women who thronged the major's quarters that unhappy morning—was prostrated, desolated, distracted by the tragedy that had come to arrive. It was as well, perhaps, that at last it manifested itself what monster was this who held this angel in bondage—the monster himself, meantime, having been led to his room by Dr. Wallen. There, half-dazed, half-

raving, he resisted and declaimed until at last their measures took effect, both doctors being with him now, and he was partially disrobed and compelled to lie down upon the bed. There one or both of them sat and watched the rest of the livelong day. There, finally, after nightfall a trained nurse took station with attendants in readiness in the hallway, for delirium had set in and Dwight's condition was declared critical.

Bad as it was, this was by no means the sole topic of talk for Minneconjou's seething population. Among the women, Mrs. Ray stood foremost as heroine of the occasion, and half the feminine element of the garrison had been to call and congratulate and praise her before the day was done. But Marion was in no mood for either. It had come to her as a vital question what to do with Priscilla. Sandy had charged his cousin in so many words with having deliberately incited Major Dwight to his furious and unreasoning assault, so Sandy regarded it, upon his only son, and Sandy had for a week or more been looking upon Dwight as a wronged and injured man. Priscilla, as we know, had virtually and virtuously admitted much of her error to Aunt Marion, but persisted that though they both, Mrs. Thornton and she, considered that it was high time Jimmy was punished instead of petted, they never dreamed to what length the father would go. "Punished for what?" indignantly demanded Aunt Marion. "For his having so cruelly hurt Georgie Thornton, and then denying all

knowledge of it," was the reply. Words are inadequate to describe the indignation with which Mrs. Ray heard and answered. Jimmy never knew it at the time or heard, until late that night, of what had happened. Hogan, and others for that matter, saw the entire affair. Jimmy was whirling his English-made jacket about his head as he raced in pursuit of the leader, never realizing that Georgie Thornton, swift almost as himself, was close at his right hand. The button had cut its keen-edged way without so much as a shock or pause. Jimmy never even suspected it. In that, as in everything else, said she, he had told his father the entire truth, though Mrs. Ray herself hardly dreamed how much he had to tell. So by noontime Priscilla had again shut herself in her room to ponder over the miscarriage of her excellent intentions, and to pray, as well she might, for future guidance.

But while at the Rays', and possibly at the Dwights', there was little thought or talk of any other topic all the morning, all over the garrison was buzzing a second story that started soon after the newsboy from town, cantering out on his cow pony just before guard-mounting, sold his three dozen *Stars* inside of an hour and sent him back for more. The colonel and surgeon were first to receive and read. Dwight received, but never read, and other majors, captains and subalterns—not to mention non-commissioned officers and privates—chased the newsboy in eagerness to buy. It was a paragraph on an inside page, modest and moderate enough in itself—

for the frontier press has learned to know the army and not to defame it—but it stirred a sensation at Minneconjou its editor refused to start in town. In brief, it was as follows:

ASSAULT ALLEGED

Just as we go to press a dispatch is received from a representative of the STAR, who left last night on the westbound Flyer. The train was flagged at Fort Siding and boarded, with the assistance of a ranchman, by Captain Stanley Foster, of the Cavalry, lately visiting friends at Minneconjou. The officer was bruised, bleeding, and well-nigh exhausted, but managed to tell that he had been held up while driving, had been forcibly carried out on the open prairie, and brutally beaten by ruffians whom he declares to be soldiers, all strangers to him with one exception. The captain names as ringleader a prominent and well-known young officer of the post.

Dr. Fowler, of Sagamore Heights, was called by wire, met the train at the Pass, and went on with the injured man. The story, of course, sounds incredible, and cannot as yet be substantiated.

It was just after lunch time when a messenger came to the Rays. The surgeon asked if the lieutenant could come to Major Dwight a moment, and the doctor himself met Sandy at the door. The veteran's face was very grave. He had known the young officer but a few months. He had known his father long. "Are you feeling fit for a hard interview?" he asked.

"If need be. What's the matter?"

"Dwight is in a fearful frame of mind, and the Lord only knows how it is to end. Dwight realizes now that

Jimmy was entirely innocent of any knowledge of that thing the Thorntons charged him with. Your mother sent Hogan and a trumpeter up here. Both had seen the whole affair, and Dwight *would* see them. He never could have rested till he got the facts. We have persuaded him that he must not question his wife, and that French cat says she cannot leave her mistress an instant. He's raging now to see you, and I reckon it's no use trying more sedatives until you are off his mind. Will you come in?"

Ray pondered a moment, then, "Go ahead," said he.

They found Dwight pacing the floor like a caged and raging lion. He whirled on the two the moment they entered, Wallen vainly preaching self-control and moderation. The misery in the man's face killed the last vestige of Ray's antipathy. It was something indescribable.

"Sandy, I'm in hell, but—it's the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth I must have. Did you—before you joined us at the Grand in Naples—did you meet—did you see Mrs. Dwight?"

"Yes," said Ray.

Dwight halted, resting his shaking hand on the back of a chair, and the shake went down through the back and legs to the very floor.

"Where? How?"

"In front of Cook's Bank. Mrs. Dwight was in an open carriage; why should n't I speak to her?" And the head went up and back, so like his father.

"No reason whatever, but why should she lie? Tell me that! Why should she swear that my boy, Margaret's boy, lied? Oh, my God, tell me that!"

"Major, Major!" pleaded Wallen, with outstretched hand. "This will never do. This——"

"Let him alone," said the senior bluntly. "It's got to come."

"Because," said Ray, looking straight at his man, "I was fool enough to fall in love with her the same time you did at Manila. Perhaps she thought I'd be black-guard enough to follow her after she became your wife."

"You—you met her—called upon her—at the Grand, I remember."

"I did, and I'd do the same thing again. I wanted my letters, and I had a right to them. She said that she had burned them all, and that ended it. There's never been a line between us since. I have never seen her since—when I could decently avoid it. I hope to God I'll never have to see her—again."

"There, there, Dwight, that's more than enough," said Dr. Waring, watching narrowly the working features. "Thank you, Ray. Nothing more could be asked or expected." Then, *sotto voce*, "Get out quick!" and Ray, every nerve athrill, passed forth into the hallway, passed another door, which quickly opened, and out came Félicie, finger on lip, eyes dilated, one hand held forth in eager appeal.

"Oh, Monsieur—Mr. Ray, just one second, I implore—

Madame implores. She beg to see you." And the hand just grazed his arm, as he burst impetuously, angrily by. "You go to ——" was on his furious lip, but he bit the words in twain and bolted down the stairs and out into the open air, mopping his heated brow.

The adjutant was coming swiftly up the row. He had hastened forth from a vine-covered piazza well toward the eastward end just as Ray, with heart still hammering, came limping again into the glare of the sunlight. As they neared each other—the staff officer with quick, springy step, the subaltern somewhat halting and lame—the latter caught sight of a sabre swinging at the senior's hip. What but one thing at that hour of the day could this portend? One moment brought the answer:

"Mr. Ray, I reg——" with reddened cheek and blinking eyes, began the adjutant, who liked him well. Then, with sudden effort, "I—you are hereby placed in close arrest and confined to your quarters—by order of Colonel Stone."

CHAPTER XIV

REACTION

THAT colonel was a very unhappy man. "All the devils in the calendar," said he, "have broken loose here at Minneconjou. My cavalry commander has gone stark, staring mad, and it takes four men to hold him. His wife cannot stay under the same roof and live, says the maid. Madame must repose herself, or die. Mrs. Stone says she might take the mistress under our roof, but she'll be damned if she'll take the maid—at least she meant that. I said it. The maid says the mistress will die if they are separated an instant, which suggests a happy end to one of our troubles, and the cause of all the rest; and to cap the climax, Billy Ray's boy has done the maddest thing ever dreamed of in Dakota. Why, doctor, I tell you it *can't* be doubted! Foster wires the identification was complete. He dropped the handkerchief that hid his face. Department Headquarters wired at once to slap him in arrest and investigate, and the further we look the worse it looks for Ray—and then, by gad, he denies the whole thing and demands a court-martial! Was ever a man so mixed as I am!"

It was even as Stone said. Dwight was for the time

being, at least, as mad as a maniac. "Brain fever," said the wiseacres about the post, "superinduced by sun-stroke abroad and scandal at home." Since Tuesday night he had recognized no one, had raved or muttered almost incessantly, and at times had struggled fiercely with his attendants in the effort to leave his bed. Mrs. Dwight's room adjoined that in which he lay, and Félicie had incurred the wrath of the doctor by urging that Madame's condition demanded that Monsieur be removed to hospital or to some remote apartment about the neighborhood. To take him to hospital meant that a score of sick or semi-convalescents should be disturbed. If Madame could not sleep where she was, let Madame move. There was nothing on earth the matter with Madame but nerves—and a nuisance in shape of a maid, said the doctor, whereat Félicie had proclaimed him, too, a monster, and fled to Madame. Mrs. Stone had indeed come and offered Mrs. Dwight shelter under the colonel's roof, but she said at the same time the colonel drew the line at the maid, and told Wallen he would not tolerate that bunch of frippery and impudence. Mrs. Dwight was in dread and misery. What *could* have happened to so prostrate her beloved husband? No, a thousand times no, she could not think of leaving him! What she needed was restoratives—something to give her strength that she might hie to his bedside and tenderly nurse and care for him. She had had too much restorative, swore Wallen, when he heard this tale. "We've

shut off the champagne with which that hussy had been dosing her—not that she did n't demand it—and now it's Katzenjammer as much as anything else. If anybody is to move, let the maid move her to the spare room on the floor below—where Foster slept.” But Inez could not think of moving so far from her husband's side.

Of Dwight's sudden insanity (so most of Minneconjou regarded it) and his furious treatment of little Jim the garrison spoke with bated breath and infinite compassion and distress. Nothing but mental derangement could account for it. Mrs. Thornton and Priscilla, it may be conjectured, did not confide to their neighbors any too much of their share in the matter, Mrs. Thornton assuring all who questioned her that *she* had done her *best* to assure the major that Jimmy could not possibly have purposely or knowingly struck her boy, which was partially true; and Priscilla had declined all conversation on the subject, save with her aunt, and Mrs. Ray, it may be surmised, was not the woman to tell broadcast of her niece's responsibility in the premises, whatever she might later say to Oswald Dwight. Moreover, Marion Ray was not then in mood to talk confidentially with anyone outside of her own doors, for the misfortune—the wrong—that had come to Sandy had well-nigh overwhelmed her.

Like the man he was, Stone had called at the house the moment she intimated through his own messenger that she was in readiness to see him. The adjutant be-

fore returning to report his action to the post commander had so far departed from the strict letter of his duty as to confidentially inform the dazed young officer that the order had come by wire from St. Paul. It was not the colonel's doing.

Sandy was in his room, "cooling off," as he said, when, with all his own troubles and others' deeds upon his head and clouding his honest old face, the post commander himself came in, took the mother's hand and led her to a seat. "It can't upset you more than it has me, my friend," said he. "I s'pose the explanation of it all is that they met somehow—accidentally, perhaps—renewed the quarrel; Sandy was possibly getting the worst of it and the men, whoever they were, could n't stand that, for they worshiped him, and pitched in. There are few of our fellows, especially in the cavalry, that don't just love Sandy. There are some here that hate Foster," and then Stone stopped, astounded, confused, for Marion Ray, with rising color, interrupted:

"Why, Colonel Stone, you speak as though you thought it possible that my son *could* have been concerned in this affair!"

For an instant the colonel struggled for words, his red face mottling in the violence of his emotion.

"Why, how can I help it, Mrs. Ray, with all I have heard? But—but I'm more than glad you don't. What does he say?"

"That he never dreamed of such a thing," was the

brief answer, and Stone hitched half a dozen different ways in his chair.

"Colonel Leale, Department Inspector, was on that train," said Stone slowly, "and reported Foster's story verbatim, I suppose, to department headquarters, where the arrest was ordered at once, and they demand that we apprehend the confederates. The general's away, and there is n't a man at headquarters that smelt powder in the Civil War—or they'd know confederates were n't so precious easy to apprehend. The men who might have been implicated all swear they were in town at the time and can prove an alibi; and unless Sandy will tell, who can?"

"You still speak as though he could have had something to do with the assault, Colonel. I'll call him to speak for himself." So Sandy came down. Colonel and subaltern were left together, and Marion, with sore, wounded and anxious heart, stepped into her own little snugger to look at the picture of her far-away husband (ah, how she missed him and needed him!) and of Maidie, her sweet and winsome daughter, now Mrs. Stuyvesant of Gotham, of Sandy in the cadet uniform of his yearling days and the khaki of Manila, of Billy, Junior, now far away studying for the entrance exams at the famous Academy. Of the four beings she most devotedly loved, only one was with her now, her deeply, doubly wronged Sandy, whose impetuous, indignant tones she could hear so distinctly as he told his own story to the

colonel's sympathetic ear. So distinctly indeed could she hear her own boy that for a moment she failed to hear Margaret's little Jim, standing patiently, pathetically at the threshold; but at sight of his sorrowful face her arms went out to him instantly. Jim could think—speak—of nothing but his father, his father who, they all told him, was so ill that he would not know his own blessed boy, who could not have known him or himself or anybody that dreadful morning! Love and anxiety, utter trust and forgiveness, were uppermost in the loyal little heart, and Marion, speechless, held and rocked him in her arms as she listened to his broken words and to the sound of the brave young voice in the parlor. Oh, what would she *not* have to tell in that next letter to her husband, now so many a weary league of land and sea beyond possibility of call!

A badgered man was Stone, as he tramped back homeward, taking a short cut across the parade, ostensibly to look at the patchwork along the *acequia*, the morning's task of the fatigue details, but only too obviously to avoid the eyes and greetings of the many women along the row. Sandy Ray's story was told in utter sincerity, so far as Stone could judge. Yet how was it to help him? Sandy admitted having set forth westward up the valley, having ridden lazily out beyond the butts of the rifle range, and then over the southward range to the prairie. He was gone fully two hours, he said. The moon was so low when he returned that, after leaving

his horse with the man in the stables, he could only barely see the sentry on No. 3 some distance up the post, and the sentry apparently did not see—he certainly did not challenge—him at all. That was bad. It would have been so much better if No. 3 had seen, recognized and could vouch for him. Stone did not tell Sandy of the sentry's story. He wished to think that over. Sandy said that the sentry at the stables was some distance down his post and the only man with whom he spoke was this unrecognized soldier, presumably on duty at the quartermaster's stables, where the lieutenant's mount was kept and cared for. No, Sandy did n't know his name, he did n't even notice him particularly. Two or three men, he thought, were smoking their pipes at the corral corner, away from stables, as required, and one of these had come forward as he neared the gate, and asked should he take the lieutenant's horse. Ray thanked him, dismounted and turned away. Now, what bothered the colonel was that both the sergeant in charge and each one of the four men previously questioned declared he did not know the hour at which Lieutenant Ray returned. They had gone to bed at or before 10:30, leaving the door on the bolt, so that Hogan or the lieutenant himself could easily enter. One man, in fact, went so far as to say that coming down from the Canteen about 10:30 he could have sworn almost it was Lieutenant Ray who was slowly climbing the slope to the post of No. 3, and the rear of the officers' quarters. This ac-

corded in a degree with the statement of Schmitz. What good was Sandy's story to do him if Foster firmly adhered to the statement made to the Department Inspector?

There was to have been a dance at the Assembly room Tuesday evening, but no one seemed to feel like dancing even among an indomitable few of the lassies and younger officers with whom, lads and lassies both, Sandy Ray had been vastly popular. The night wore on, dark, overcast, with the wind blowing fitfully from the Sagamore, slamming doors in resounding hallways and carrying the watch calls of the sentries weirdly over the eastward prairie. Earlier in the evening little groups appeared in some few of the verandas, but gradually broke up and went within doors long before the signal "Lights out." The officer of the day and the adjutant, under instruction from the post commander, had been questioning the three worthies who had been out the night before about the time of the alleged assault on Captain Foster. To a man they stoutly maintained that the signs and scars of battle, borne by one or two of their number, were due entirely to the free-for-all affair that occurred at that disreputable dive southwest of Silver Hill, some four miles away from the post. Virtuously were they indignant that anyone should suppose that they were in any way concerned in so abominable a transaction as the "doing-up" of an officer of the army who so recently had been the guest of their honored major. But two of them were troopers with shady

records, men who had been but a short time at the station, and one of these had formerly served an enlistment in Dwight's old regiment, the —th. The adjutant was of opinion that he must have known Foster in those days and might well have been one of quite a number of men, none of whom liked and some of whom hated the imperious and abusive lieutenant. The —th had had few of Foster's stamp since the days of Canker and Gleason, and his case was therefore the more conspicuous. The two officers were talking of this as slowly they strolled homeward up the northwest side of the parade, when, faint and wind-buffed, the call of the sentry at the main gate caught their ears. No. 2 wanted the corporal and No. 1 promptly echoed, although already the corporal was going on the jump. There was a ring and vim to the cry that told its own story. The sentry saw something that demanded instant attention. It was not half a minute before the corporal came racing back to the guard-house, nor a full minute before the bugler of the guard came chasing in pursuit of the officer of the day. "A fire, sir," he cried, "'way out beyond the Flats!"

Together the officers hastened eastward across the parade, and even before they reached the gate the cause of the alarm became visible. The low-hanging, swift-driven clouds blackening the valley were taking on a lurid glare, and, once at the gate the fire could be distinctly seen. "Well, if that is n't a blessing!" cried the adju-

tant gleefully. "It's Skid's old hog ranch, as sure as you're born!"

It was useless, of course, to send aid even if aid had been desirable. Ever since Silver Hill became the county seat and a mining town of much importance, Skidmore's dive had been the bane of the community. Driven from town by a vigilance committee made up of the best citizens, the divekeeper had resumed business beyond the corporate limits and at a point where he could draw custom from three different sources, the town, the fort and the agency, for only a few miles beyond the Cheyenne were the supply depot and buildings of the Minneconjou tribe, their brethren of Brulé being far over to the southeast and the Ogalallas at Red Cloud. Many a desperate deed had been charged to the gang ever hovering about these unsavory walls of Skidmore's, many a poor fellow had been beaten and drugged and robbed, more than one good soldier had met his death-blow in brutal affray beneath its grimy roof, and still it lived, detested but unhampered. There was no good reason why the fort should send a soul to the rescue of such a concern. There was many a reason why the town would not. Stone ordered a sergeant with a small party to ride over, "See if any of our men are there and find out what has taken place and the extent of the damage," which he hoped was total, "and report on your return."

It was after twelve when they got back, bringing a grimy fellow-soldier who had had a narrow escape, the

gratifying intelligence that there was n't so much as a shingle left unconsumed, and the unwelcome annoucement that the proprietor said he did n't care a damn. He had leased and was going to open up next week, anyhow, in the old rookeries at the ford, right under the nose of Uncle Sam, yet without his jurisdiction. They brought, also, rather a remarkable piece of news—the wife and daughter of the manager had been rescued from burning alive by one of the colonel's own men—Private Blenke, of Company "C."

CHAPTER XV

RETRIBUTION

WHETHER it was who planned or placed Fort Minneconjou, one blunder at least could be laid at his door—that it had enabled the enemy to “locate” almost at the door of the fort. An odd condition of things was this that resulted from the discovery of precious metals in the magnificent tract misnamed the Black Hills—black presumably only in the dead of winter, when their pine-crested peaks and ridges stood boldly against the dazzling white of the Dakota snows. In '75 the Sioux had bartered their secret to chance explorers, and Custer came down with his scouting columns and confirmed the glittering rumor. In '76 the Sioux squared accounts with Custer afar to the northwest in the affair of the Little Big Horn, but while they were about it the miner and settler swarmed in behind and staked out claims and cities from which they could never be driven, for Crook's starved horses and starving men were fortunately so numerous they kept the southward tribes of the savage confederation too busy to bother with settlers. *They* could be settled later, after the warriors had dealt by Crook as they did by Custer. When winter came, however, with Sitting Bull and the

Uncapapas thrust beyond the British line, and Crazy Horse, raving, done to death by the steel of the guard he so magnificently defied, with Red Cloud disarmed and deposed, with Dull Knife disabled, with Lane Deer doubled up by the sturdy Fifth Infantry, and old Two Moons hiding his light in some obscure refuge of the wilderness, and the old men, the women and children herded on the reservation under the rifles of the army and the young men scattered or slain, there was nothing left for the hard-fighting, proud-spirited lords of the Hills—Ogalalla, Brulé and Minneconjou—but sullen acceptance of the great father's terms; and in this wise came Silver Hill to the heart of the fair valley, nestling under the screen of the Sagamore and its eastward spurs and the shield of Uncle Sam, who sliced off for military purposes a block from the Minneconjou reserve, and by way of compliment and consolation named the cantonment therein established after the tribe thereof dispossessed. All went swimmingly for the emigrant, the miner, the settler and the subsequent supremacy of the white man until in course of time a big post had to be built to replace the old log barracks, and from motives of economy, in order to reduce to a minimum the expense of hauling supplies and materials of the quartermaster's department, the new buildings were planted at the extreme eastern edge of the reservation, and before the first coat of paint was dry on the lintels the opposite bank of the stream, short pistol shot from the line, was

planted thick with shacks, shanties and saloons, and every known device of the devil to prey upon the soldier.

In the five years that followed, that particular quarter section of what soon became South Dakota was a storm center of villainy, especially when the bi-monthly payday came round. By scores the soldiers were drugged and robbed, by dozens they were beaten and bullied. By twos and threes they were set upon, slugged and not infrequently someone was murdered. No jury could be found in those days to convict a civilian of any crime against the life or property of a servant of Uncle Sam. There came a time when two of the best men of the garrison, veteran sergeants, having been shot to death in cold blood by a brace of desperadoes in front of Skidmore's saloon, the garrison turned out almost to a man. The murderers fled to town on the horses of their victims; fifty troopers followed, while over fifty tore Skidmore's to shreds. Silver Hill had a riot that night, in which two deputy marshals bit the dust; so did two or three troopers, but that did n't matter. The majesty of the law that turned the original murderers loose had been violated by a brutal and ungovernable soldiery, six of whom were later surrendered to be tried for their crimes by a jury of their sworn enemies, while their commanding officer was tried for his commission by a jury of his peers. The soldiers were sent to civil prison and the colonel to military Coventry—estopped from further promotion, and Silver Hill (pronounced with an "e" in

those days) for as much as a month exulted and rejoiced with exceeding joy. Then a new general came to the command. Then Silver Hill thrust its hands deep in its pockets and whistled in dismay, for the general's first deed was to order Minneconjou's big garrison into summer camp long marches away, to leave only men enough at the post to take care of the property and thus to defraud the denizens of fringing settlement, known to the Army as Thugtown, of some thousands *per mensem* of hard-earned cash—very hard. Moreover, when winter set in, the garrison was distributed much to the betterment of Meade, Laramie, Robinson, Niobrara, etc., and to the howling protest of the sturdy settlers of Silver Hill, "thus robbed," said their eloquent representative in Congress assembled, "of the protection assured them by the national government." It was rich to hear the appalling description given that December of the perils and privations of the people of the southwestern section of the Dakotas. The Sioux were on the point of rising and butchering the helpless and scattered settlers, said Senator Bullion, and to do the county justice it must be owned that it did its level best to stir up the Minneconjous, but those "troubled waters" had been stirred too much in the past and refused now to boil over at the beck of the politicians, so what could not be done in one way was worked in another. The cat, in shape of the command, came back, and with the onward march of civilization men and women of a higher class were drawn

to Silver Hill, and the "e" from the last part of its name.

And then in army circles there came to the front a man with a head on his shoulders and a hand on the steering gear. In the interests of civilization and civilian dealers Congress had cleaned out the old-time sutler shop, which was no deplorable loss, and transferred the traffic of his successor, the post trader, to his ubiquitous rival, the publican. "The soldier's pay comes from the people and should return to the people," said the advocates of the measure, and the soldier non-voter, having about as many friends at the seat of government as a crow in a corn field, matters at Minneconjou speedily became bad as ever, for, reform having started at Silver Hill, the gamblers and harpies being kicked from its corporate limits, these philosophers,—the flotsam and jetsam of the frontier,—lost little cash and less time before settling again, and in greater numbers, on the skirts of Uncle Sam.

And then it was that, after a year or two of turmoil and trouble, "in our day there lived a man" who solved the problem, dealt rum, the flesh and the devil the worst blow known to the combination, and started under the auspices of the post Exchange the common sense and only successful system ever tried in the army, known to the Press and its civilian readers by the name of the Canteen.

And then again after a few years of peace, prosperity

and contentment, good order and discipline, after the man whose monument is inscribed "The Soldier's Friend," his good work finished, was gathered to his fathers, the resultant years of thought and experiment were overthrown in a day. A congress of women overmastered a congress of men. Exit the Canteen: Re-enter the grog shop, the hell and the hog ranch. Burned out at the borders of Silver Hill, the way blazed for him and his vile retinue of swindlers and strumpets by the best intentions that ever paved the streets of sheol, back to the gates of Fort Minneconjou came the saloon and its concomitants—and the day of order and discipline was done.

"I would n't say a word against it," protested Colonel Stone to the grave-faced Inspector sent out from St. Paul to investigate the first killing, "if, when they shut up *our* shop they had shut up *those!*" and with clinching fist he struck savagely at empty space and the swarming row of ramshackle tenements beyond the stream. "Of what earthly good was it to anybody, I ask you,—except the distiller and dealer in liquors,—to close our guarded, homelike tables and reopen that unlimited unlicensed hell?"

A new road to Silver Hill, albeit roundabout, had become a necessity. The old well-worn beeline through by way of the ford had become impracticable for women and children and self-respecting people in general. It was skirted for some two hundred yards by tenements

and tenants not easily described in these pages. The colonel had been jeered at by painted sirens at upper windows. Priscilla Sanford, starting one morning to town, turned crimson at the shrill acclaim of the scarlet sisterhood, two of whom had kissed their hands to her. Stone, when he heard of it, would have leveled the shack with the ground, but the mournful plight of his predecessor, condemned for not preventing what Stone would almost precipitate, gave him timely pause. Sandy might have sallied forth and shot somebody not feminine, but Sandy was still in arrest. The paymaster had come and gone. So had most of the money; so, worse luck, after two days of salooning, had gone no less than fifty of the garrison. In nearly two years Minneconjou had not had as many desertions as resulted from those two days.

But, sorrowful to relate, among the first to go and the last to be heard from were two of Priscilla's trustees—gone no man could say whither—and in addition to this catastrophe something had strangely, surely gone amiss with her paragon, Blenke—Blenke the scholarly, Blenke the writer and linguist—and Priscilla's world was reeling under her well-shod feet.

To begin with, how came Blenke, the impeccable, the would-be candidate for transfer to the cavalry and aspirant for commission, to be sojourning even for an hour at so disreputable a spot as Skidmore's? Blenke, it will be remembered, had a forty-eight hour pass to enable

him to visit Rapid City on important personal business. Blenke was supposed to have taken the westbound Flyer on Monday—the Flyer that flew five hours late. Blenke was supposed to be spending all Tuesday, or most of it, in the heart of the Hills. Blenke was not due at the post until the afternoon of Wednesday, and was not expected to leave Rapid City until Wednesday morning; yet here he was, of all places in the world, at that hog ranch on Tuesday night. Stone sent a patrol over at 1 A. M. with a spare horse and invitation for Private Blenke to return at once and account for his eccentric orbit at office hours in the morning. The patrol trotted over, nothing loath, but Blenke had disappeared. “Gone to town for a doctor,” said the abandoned few still groping about the smoldering ruins. So the patrol returned without him. It was represented that Blenke had scorched his face, singed off his eyebrows and burned his hands in his gallant essay to save the women. But this was all hearsay evidence.

When Blenke did appear on Wednesday afternoon his hands were bandaged, his face was disfigured a bit, but his eyes were as deep and mournful, his dignity and self-poise quite as unimpeachable, as before. He seemed grieved, indeed, that his captain and colonel both so sharply questioned him. He had intended going to Rapid City, but at the last moment in town received information rendering his visit unnecessary, indeed inadvisable. A man with whom he had had business asso-

ciations in the past, and who owed him much money, had been there, but had headed him off by promising to meet him in Silver Hill. The train came, but not the man, yet the conductor said such a man had boarded the train at the Junction and must have dropped off as they slowed up for town after passing Bonner's Bluff. Blenke had spent most of Monday night and all of Tuesday in further search. Tuesday evening came a clue. The evasive "party" had been seen at Skid's drinking heavily, and Blenke hastened thither in partial disguise, he said, and was there when late Tuesday night the shrieks from Skidmore's private quarters told of peril. The drunken crowd in the bar at first took no heed. Shrieks were things of frequent occurrence, but Blenke had rushed, found the shack all ablaze within, and with difficulty and much personal risk had succeeded in pulling out Mrs. Skidmore and her terrified child.

Blenke by manner, not by words, continued to convey to his inquisitors that he took it much amiss that a soldier who had done such credit to his uniform and the service should on his return be subjected to such rigid cross-questioning, and be treated with such obvious suspicion. But both colonel and captain had more to ask. Had he seen aught of the trio from the fort who claimed to have spent Monday evening at Skidmore's? Blenke declared he had not. He had spent that evening searching about town; but he had heard of them, yes. There was no little talk among the cowboys, tramps, toughs, and ranchmen

in and about Skidmore's concerning a party of soldiers that had been there hours Monday evening "raising the devil." There had been a rough-and-tumble fight, too, but Blenke virtuously disclaimed all personal knowledge of the men or their misdemeanors. Asked to name some of the places he had visited Monday evening and Tuesday in town, Blenke unhesitatingly mentioned as many as a dozen. The adjutant jotted them down, and when the colonel sent an officer in to investigate, it was found that Blenke's statement, like his manner, was irreproachable. Moreover, it was found by the testimony of certain hangers-on at Skidmore's that the story told by the incarcerated trio was equally true. They had been seen about the premises, drinking, card-playing, loafing, early in the evening, and "off and on" all of the evening, until toward 10:30 o'clock they became so ugly and quarrelsome and had so little money left that Skid refused them further admission, even to wash the blood from their battered faces. If the purpose of the examination was to connect these men, any of them, with the assault upon Foster, it had certainly failed.

Even when Foster's verbatim statement came, duly type-written and vouched for, and further examination was made, and Blenke and the three worthies were further investigated, nothing was admitted and little learned. Foster's statement was read by the adjutant and received in grim silence by the colonel and one or two seniors called in for the occasion. Smarting under the indignity with

which he had been treated, said Foster, and finding the Flyer would not be along before ten or half-past ten, he decided to take a buggy, drive out to the post and seek an interview with the colonel and certain other officers. It was due to his honor that his statement be heard. He ordered his traps sent to the train, so that if delayed he could drive thither at once, or even have the ranchman caretaker at Fort Siding "flag the train." Barely two miles out from town he overtook some soldiers apparently drunk; one of them reeled almost under his horse's nose; he pulled up in dismay, and instantly they attacked him on all sides at once. He was knocked senseless, and when he came to himself they were all out on the southward prairie. He could see the lights of the fort far away. He was propped against a wheel and they were wrangling among themselves. He was bleeding, dazed, had been cruelly beaten, but his wits were returning. The moonlight was clear, and suddenly, in a row that broke out among them, they fell upon each other, and a young, slight-looking man, who seemed to be their leader, in striving to quell the row, lost the handkerchief that hid his face. His light raincoat was torn open, revealing the uniform of a lieutenant of cavalry. The form, features, the dark little mustache, all that he could see, were certainly those of Lieutenant Ray. Staggering to his feet, he unhappily drew their attention again to himself, and then he was slugged and knocked senseless and knew no more until he was being helped aboard the Pullman.

One of the men he vaguely remembered having seen before, but the only one of the party he could have recognized was Lieutenant Ray. All Minneconjou, he said, knew of the fracas between them that day; but few, perhaps, had heard the lieutenant's threats, and in this brutal fashion had he fulfilled them.

Copies of this, of course, had gone to Department Headquarters. The commander was expected back at the end of the week from his tour of inspection at Yellowstone Park. Sandy could not be held in close arrest beyond the eighth day; but that the affair would have to be thoroughly investigated by general court everybody felt and said. Indeed, Ray himself would be content with nothing less. But what a solemn time was this for Marion, his devoted mother; indeed for all at Minneconjou.

Up at the "ranking" end of the row Oswald Dwight lay in the grasp of a burning fever that, coupled with what had gone before, had weakened his reason and might well end his life. Under the same roof, visited at intervals by the charitable, the sympathetic or the merely inquisitive of their sex and station, Mrs. Dwight and her inseparable companion, Félicie, made their moan and told their woeful tale to all comers. Inez had been, she said, suffering all the torments of purgatory, and to many eyes she looked it. Her husband, in his mad delirium, would not have her near him: *he* raved of the wife of his youth. She wept for his boy who had been taken from

her, his proper, his natural, his legal protector at such a time. Inez was horrified to think of the outrage upon Captain Foster, their attached and devoted friend. Inez would never believe, she said, that such a gentleman as Mr. Ray could stoop to so vile a vengeance, to the level of the assassin, but Félicie had other views. The episode of that blood-stained gauntlet had been by no means forgotten, and was dinned into the ears of those who would listen, with infinite vim and pertinacity; this, too, despite the fact that Ray denied having worn gauntlets that evening—having worn them, in fact, that summer. They were no longer “uniform” for cavalry officers, and he had not set eyes on that glove or its mate for over a month. Possibly during the move from the major’s quarters to the humble home of the subaltern, but certainly somehow, Ray had lost several items that, before the change in uniform, had been in frequent use, but of late would hardly be missed, and of these were the gauntlets.

So there was distress—anxiety—sorrowing in more than one of the many households at Minneconjou, and in the midst of it all Priscilla, who had thought her burden, self-inflicted though it was, quite as much as she could bear, was confronted with another. Blenke, who had been nervous, excitable, almost ill on the very few occasions she had seen him since his return; Blenke, who had promised to confide to her, his benefactress, the cause of his worries, the story of his woes; Blenke, whose

mournful eyes had blazed with a fine fury when told by Hogan, who could n't abide him, of Miss Sanford's salutation from the window of the reoccupied rookery at the ford; Blenke, who could never set foot on the floor of the Canteen, turned up missing one night at check rollcall, two hours after taps, was suddenly and most unexpectedly stumbled on by the officer of the day making his rounds at 3 A. M.: not, as might have happened to men of less indomitable virtue, coming from the direction of Skidmore's, but almost at the very opposite end of the garrison, at the rear gateway of the field officers' quarters, No. 2, so obviously obfuscated, so utterly limp, that he could give no account of himself whatever, was wheeled to the guard-house in a police cart and dumped on the slanting bunk of the prison room with a baker's dozen of the "Skidmore guard" sleeping off their unaccustomed drunk.

CHAPTER XVI

MY LADY'S MAID

IT proved the last pound that broke the back of Priscilla's stubborn resistance. Men and women who had found much to condemn in Miss Sanford, who had disseminated and discussed the tale of her correspondence with the *Banner* and the talk that followed, who had heard with indignation that it was after Dwight's conference with Miss Sanford that he so furiously punished little Jim (for, as we know, Mrs. Thornton had assured everybody that so far as *she* was concerned she had done her utmost to make the major understand that Jimmy never did it on purpose), who had felt the lash of her over-candid comment on their social or parental shortcomings, now had no little malicious merriment to add to the deservedly hard things they had said of her. For a fortnight, probably, Miss Sanford had been the most unpopular woman that Minneconjou's oldest inhabitant could name; but the men and women who saw her as one after another she faced the results of her most confident efforts, began to feel for the lonely, sorrowing maiden a respect and sympathy denied her before. It was plain that Priscilla was well-nigh crushed, and "when women weep" and are desolate and hopeless

resentment turns to pity and blame to words of cheer. No one, of course, was ever told by Mrs. Ray or by Sandy of what had passed in the sanctity of the family circle, but in her humility and contrition Priscilla spoke of it to Mrs. Stone and to others, who soon came to try to show her she was forgiven. There were a few days after Dwight's fever in which she seemed utterly heart-broken, and Mrs. Ray believed her seriously ill. There were days in which she begged Aunt Marion to send her home, when, really, she had no home; to send her East, then, where she could begin anew and work her way in the world. If it came to the worst, Maidie Stuyvesant would keep her from starving. But Aunt Marion would listen to no such proposition. Priscilla must stay with her and at Minneconjou and live down the unhappy repute. Aunt Marion knew how very much genuine good there was in Priscilla when once she could rid herself of that propensity ever to correct, criticise, and condemn; nor had Minneconjou been slow to see this and to speak of it. Now that the tide was turning, by dozens they came to talk of her real charity, her devotion to the sick and sorrowing, the hours she had given—was ever ready to give—to reading to the bed-ridden and helpless in hospital or the humble quarters of the married soldiers. Men who had laughed among themselves at her lecturing and preaching took to snubbing men who spoke in disparagement of her motives. One thing was certain, whether they shared her views or not, all Minneconjou

believed in her sincerity, and soldiers honor those who fight and suffer for their convictions. Of Priscilla it might therefore be said she had made friends in spite of herself, and though hardened sinners at the mess and humor-loving husbands in the quarters *did* indulge in little flings at the ultimate and inevitable failure of all feminine meddlings in matters that were purely military, there were few, indeed, after the first mirthful explosions, who having seen her sorrowful face did not feel genuine sympathy for her in the collapse of her Anti-Canteen Soldiers' Benevolent Association.

For with Blenke's fall Priscilla was left indeed lamenting and alone.

Something of a *cause célèbre* was that of Blenke's when it came to trial. The summary court officer had had his hands full since payday. The number of cases of absence without leave, drunkenness, disorder, and disrespect to non-commissioned officers, etc., had sextupled. All were what might be called typical cases, and traceable, as a rule, to Skidmore's; but Blenke's, like Blenke himself, was individual and peculiar. Moreover, it savored of the mysterious.

The man seemed overwhelmed with mortification and distress. No one at Minneconjou had ever known him to take so much as a glass of wine. No one at Minneconjou among either officers or men ever really knew him at all, for Blenke kept his own counsel, lived entirely to himself, was neat as a new pin, prompt and accurate on

duty, smart in dress—more so than many of his officers, if truth be told—ready, respectful and in fine a model soldier. But he had no friends nor intimates; he had no confidants, unless we except Priscilla, to whom he had told much more than Sandy Ray, when told, would for a moment believe. He came before the court after two days' incarceration, neat and trim as though just off inspection. He stood with swimming eyes before the desk, pleaded guilty throughout, declined to summon a soul to say a good word for him or his general character, would not even glance at the group of officers hovering inquisitively about, would not even plead "first offense" or urge a syllable in mitigation of sentence, even though the allegations against him, as the court intimated to his captain, "seemed piling it on." One specification might well have covered the entire tale of his misdoing, but he stood accused of absence from quarters between taps and reveille, of presence in premises where he had no possible right to be, and finally of utter drunkenness. Blenke pleaded guilty to all, and humbly said that, had there been more accusation, he would have done the same, for he knew nothing of what occurred after fifteen minutes at Skidmore's somewhere toward midnight.

Now, the court wished to know and the listeners wished to hear some explanation of his having turned up so far from the beaten track; of his having, when so drunk, managed to walk so far; of his having, in fine, entered the yard of Major Dwight's quarters. What

could have suggested that? But Blenke knew no more than the dead. The only quarters of late he ever visited were those of Lieutenant Ray, where, said Blenke—and here the woe in his visage was indeed pathetic—he should never again dare show his face. Time had been—a happy time—when he had daily, almost hourly, duties at the quarters now occupied by Major Dwight, whom he so honored; but that was while his kind friends of Lieutenant Ray's household were still the occupants. Possibly in his dazed condition that memory was working in what was left of his brain. There was nothing to excuse or explain his wandering thither now, said Blenke. He had no mercy to ask. He deserved none. So the case was closed with a sizable fine, and the accused sent back to his company.

But the officer of the day had told a different tale, and the godless array at the bachelor mess was still having fun with it. Félicie, the self-styled French maid, had been from the start the object of no little interest among the non-commissioned element in garrison. Félicie was pious, if not actually pretty, and assiduous at first in Sunday morning attendance at the little Catholic church in town, whither Dwight's own horse and buggy and man were detailed to take her, for Inez could not think of placing her educated and traveled maid in the same category and wagon with the soldiers' wives. "Feelissy," from her very first appearance, was by no means popular with this critical sisterhood, and when it became evident

that some of the best beaux among the sergeants were also moved to attend early church in Silver Hill, feeling grew strong against the usurper. Nor was the feeling modified by the fact soon discovered that the maid had higher aspirations. She was too good for the soldiers, said her commentators; but that goodness, said her defamers, was n't proof against the wiles of those who had more money. Obviously the officers were aimed at in this observation, and it must be owned that Félicie's expressive eyes had sometimes wandered toward the mess, and that her glances fell not all on unresponsive others. The night of Blenke's wandering was windy. The officer of the day's little lantern blew out as he rounded a turn from the west gate toward the bluff behind the post of No. 4, to the end that he stumbled on the sentry unchallenged, and, when rebuked for his negligence, the sentry said he was troubled about something at Major Dwight's. He could have sworn, he said, the door to the high back stoop had opened just a moment ago, letting quite a streak of light into the darkness for the space of a few seconds, during which time he was almost sure he saw a slender feminine shape disappear into the house. Now, he could swear no one had entered the back gate for ten minutes, anyway, because he happened to be right there. If it was a woman, as he believed, she must have been out in the yard as much as those ten minutes, and perhaps someone was there with her that should n't be there. All this had the sentry

urged in excuse of his failure to hear the approach of the officer of the day. It was a black, moonless, starless night, and the officer concluded to look. The board fence was high. He stepped within the gate, stumbled over a loose plank, made quite a noise and said a few audibly profane things as to the quartermaster's department for leaving walks in such shape, but he could see nothing. So in a sheltered nook he struck a match, and the instant he did so a man from the shadows lurched heavily against him, muttered, "Giv'sh—light—o' man" and sprawled in a heap at his feet. It proved to be Blenke, and Blenke proved to the satisfaction of the court that he was blind drunk.

But the officer of the day and his comrades at the mess were beginning to see light, as did the sentry on No. 4. Was it possible that Félicie, who scorned the advances of the more prominent of the rank and file, and had become an object of no little interest even to certain susceptible subalterns—had, after all, reserved her smiles for the dark-eyed, mournful, and romantic Blenke? If so, then Blenke had played the part of a man with the skill of a consummate actor.

"I've seen Willard; I've seen Wyndham," said the puzzled captain, "and I thought I'd seen 'David Garrick' played to perfection, but if Private Beauty Blenke, of Company 'C,' Sixty-first Foot, was n't drunk as a lord that night, then Willard and Wyndham are n't in the business."

CHAPTER XVII

A MOMENTOUS DAY

A WEEK,—another long week,—went by at Minneconjou, and Major Dwight at last was declared out of danger, though a badly shattered man. Mrs. Dwight, who should have shown corresponding improvement, seemed, however, not so well. Just in proportion as the major mended, his wife appeared to fail. Both doctors persisted in the belief that her case was one of nerves entirely. There was nothing organically wrong. She had been under a great strain, of course, and her husband, in his lucid moments, as well as in those of delirium, had shown strong antipathy to her presence in the sick room. They had persuaded her, without much difficulty, that it were better she kept away, and though pathetically, properly grieved, she obeyed. Something, however, was preying upon her—something she could not and would not confide to Mrs. Stone and other sympathetic would-be consolers. “Madame was distressed at ill news from her parents,” Félicie had gone so far as to admit, but the ill news did not seem to refer to illness, for there had been frequent letters addressed in Farrell’s sprawling fist, or the señora’s precise chirog-

raphy, and of late these had begun to be supplemented by telegrams.

In all this fortnight of alternating hope and anxiety Mrs. Ray had, with proper inquiries, called but twice. She could do no less. She would do no more. Mrs. Dwight occasionally appeared for an afternoon drive now, but always with Félicie by her side in the phaeton—never, now that her husband's guest and wits were gone, with a man. Other companionship might have been better for her, it was generally suggested, but she seemed to shrink from the conversation and, possibly, the interrogations of those of her own sex and social caste.

Great was the surprise, therefore, when a polite and perfumed note came to the Rays for Miss Priscilla Sanford, and would Miss Sanford do Mrs. Dwight the great kindness to drive with her that day? Priscilla, who knew not why, and who would gladly have avoided her, ordinarily, was now doing universal penance according to her lights, and would have gone driving with a Jezebel. Priscilla accepted, and Félicie, for the first time, was left at home.

Sandy Ray's health had been suffering, and Stone saw it, and of his own motion came over and said he considered it necessary that Mr. Ray should take exercise. Walking being painful, the colonel said ride, and, despite his arrest, riding anywhere within five miles' limit of the flagstaff. Sandy thanked him, but really tried to sulk and stay home, until the mother's gentle appeal pre-

vailed and he began as the colonel had suggested. There were men who thought the general would "row" Stone for such indulgence to a man under serious charges, but Stone said he knew his business—and the general. He would neither argue nor defend his position, but he would like to bet two to one the general would approve. It was rumored the general himself thought of running out to Minneconjou and perhaps away to Wister and looking into matters along the lower line, having but recently returned from a look along the upper. The court had not yet been ordered. It was believed that the charges might still be withdrawn, so difficult was it to believe Sandy Ray capable of such a crime. But Ray insisted on trial, said he desired the most rigid investigation, and could never be content without. It was a most unsatisfactory situation, so far as he was concerned, and, with no duty to perform, no drill to stir his blood, nothing to do but try to comfort mother, reassure Maidie, who was writing every day or two, watch for the coming of the mail from Manila and the detail for his court, Sandy Ray was growing morbid.

He was gone and loping up the valley when the phaeton with pale-faced, languid Mrs. Dwight stopped at the door for Miss Sanford. Ray did not wish to see her. He had not seen her to speak to since the night before Dwight's breakdown, as that episode by common consent was now referred to. He had altered his manner toward Priscilla, though resentment still rankled, because of her

almost dependent position under their roof. Had Priscilla owned enough money to take her back to the seaboard States, and had then remained, Sandy, perhaps, would have found forgiveness beyond him. Even now he raged at heart when he thought of her willful exaggeration as to the Canteen, her utter misrepresentation of facts—especially as to his father. Again and again he owned to his mother he felt like shaking Priscilla whenever he looked at little Jim, who so often now became his companion on these daily rides. Once or twice, when the patient was sleeping soundly, the doctors had taken the lad to his bedside, but the meeting between them was yet to come. Dwight was still too weak for experiments, and how he would bear it all when stronger was a matter of grave conjecture.

But on this particular day when the phaeton came for Priscilla, little Jim had again been trouting with Sergeant French and, as luck would have it, came dancing in with his basket of prizes to show Aunt Marion just as Priscilla descended from her room, dressed for the drive. Three weeks ago Priscilla would have reproved his entering without first washing his hands and smoothing his hair. To-day she bent and hurriedly kissed his flushed and happy face, and he looked up astonished. They had never let him know—they could not bear to speak of—Priscilla's share in the events of that tragic morning, and when in her downright honesty Priscilla would have sought and told him, Aunt Marion forbade. The boy

who formerly shrank from was now growing to like her. She read to him, helped him in the daily lessons, Aunt Marion deeming it wise he should study even though this was vacation time; but never before had he known Priscilla to tender a caress. Mrs. Ray watched them curiously as together they left the room to see his catch properly stored in the icebox. Presently, hand in hand, they returned through the hall and went forth upon the veranda just as the phaeton suddenly drew up at the gate, and Priscilla felt the little hand withdrawing. He did not know mamma was coming. He went unwillingly, but obedient, to receive her effusive words of greeting, and to hear, unresponsive, that he, dear child, was looking so much better since dear Mrs. Ray had taken charge of him in all these dreadful days. But she did not ask him to drive with them, nor did he wish to go, for she had need to speak with Priscilla, and Jimmy would have been in the way.

It seems that matters had come to such a pass that Mrs. Dwight felt that she must have advice, and, oh, how her heart yearned for a friend! Many of the ladies had been kind, yes, very kind, Mrs. Stone especially; and others, even Mrs. Ray, who she felt, she feared, she *knew*, did not like or trust her, though she had so longed to win Mrs. Ray's friendship. But even Mrs. Stone and Mrs. Ray could not be to her now what she so needed—a real friend and adviser, a confidant, in fact, and these ladies were, though they did not look it, of an age suf-

ficient to be her mother. What she craved was one nearer herself in years (Miss Sanford was certainly ten years older and not easily flattered), for now a time had come, said Mrs. Dwight, when there might be conflict between the duty she owed her husband and—and—— Priscilla gasped and bridled and began to bristle all over with premonition of what might be coming, then breathed a sudden sigh of relief, yet of disappointment, as Mrs. Dwight concluded with "the deference due her parents." In their letters both her father and her mother had been appealing to her to appeal to her husband to come further to their financial aid; that Major Farrell had relied upon the backing of his son-in-law in certain enterprises; that he was now in desperate straits, and—and finally they had gone so far as to threaten—threaten her, their daughter, with untold calamity if she did not instantly assure them that material aid would speedily be forthcoming. She had written, telling them of her husband's perilous plight, of the possibly fatal illness, of the impossibility of anything being done until his recovery, and their telegrams in acknowledgment were imperative. She felt that she must bring her burden of trouble and ask Miss Sanford,—of whose charity and gentleness the garrison never tired of telling by the hour,—for Miss Sanford must feel and know that since the day he so raged against his own son, he—he had even seemed to turn against her, his devoted and dutiful wife.

And now when the doctors said he was almost well

enough to be approached on matters of urgent business, she dared not. She had lost, perhaps, her influence. "Then what could *I* possibly do?" asked Priscilla bluntly, and then came the explanation. The woman whom he most honored, respected, believed in, the woman who had been the devoted friend of her,—that was gone, with, alas, his heart buried by her side,—that woman, Mrs. Ray, if she would but speak with him, plead with him for her, his fond, but, ah, so cruelly misjudged wife, whose heart was failing her now, and at a time when for his sake as well as hers she needed all her strength. If Mrs. Ray could but see her way to do this, ah, with what gratitude and devotion would she, Inez, ever think of her—and all Minneconjou knew Mrs. Ray's love for her noble niece. Everyone said that if Miss Sanford but willed a thing and urged it upon her aunt it was a thing accomplished. Out of the goodness of her heart would not Miss Sanford strive for her, a heart-crushed, well-nigh hopeless wife, upon whom there had but recently dawned the knowledge that, that—could not Miss Sanford imagine?

And in the midst of the gush of tears with which she closed came sudden distraction. They had been trundling easily, aimlessly over the smooth, hard prairie road, the well-trained, well-matched ponies ambling steadily along. They had given the cavalry herds and herd guards a wide berth, and the townward route, for Mrs. Dwight shunned, she said, the sight of almost any face but the sweet and sympathetic one beside her. They had turned southward,

after rounding Castle Butte, a bold, jagged upheaval among the nearest foothills, and were winding slowly down this narrow and crooked ravine toward the broad Minneconjou bottom, when, as the ponies reached a fairly level bit of road, and were swiftly turning a point of bluff, they suddenly and violently shied to the right, almost upsetting the dainty vehicle, and nearly pitching its helpless freight headlong into the road. Then with the bits in their teeth, away they tore, full gallop down the next incline, the phaeton bounding after them, and so, mercifully as it happened, out upon the broad level of the valley, with the Minneconjou and its fringing line of cottonwoods barely five hundred yards across the bench. The pygmy tiger had been left at home; his ears would have been too active, and Mrs. Dwight, though accustomed to driving her usually gentle and tractable team, was utterly helpless now. She hung on desperately to the reins. But this was a new and delirious experience for the merry little scamps in harness. They were headed for home. There was a deep bend of the stream and a ford through the shallows, and an abrupt dip of four feet from the bench level, and the words of their fair, frail charioteer were stimulating rather than soothing, so away they went, and it was high time for Miss Sanford, if she wished to save their necks, to throw convention and etiquette to the wind, to take personal control—and the reins.

No one ever doubted Priscilla's nerve, yet here sat Priscilla hanging on to the side-rail with both hands and

staring backward, her head twisted half round, with all her wondering, startled eyes, for the objects that had stampeded the ponies were a brace of frowsy, blanketed Minneconjou braves, squatted on the bunch grass in the shade of the bluffs at the side of the road, in close conference with two men in khaki and campaign hats, one of them, though instantly the brim was jerked down over his eyes, she knew to be Blenke,—Blenke whose woe-begone, remorseful letters she had duly filed and docketed, but who, he declared, was too shame-stricken to show his face to her of all the world. What on earth was Blenke doing there in that out-of-the-way nook, and in confab with Indians? They were hidden from view by a wave of prairie almost as suddenly as they had been whirled into sight, and then Priscilla had to give her aid and attention to Mrs. Dwight, who was swaying in her seat. She grasped the reins with her strong, wiry hands, but the little devils were within an hundred yards of the brink and reckless of everything but the mad exhilaration of a runaway. She heard from somewhere a shout, "Pull your left rein *hard!*" and with both hands she tugged with sudden and startling result. The ponies almost instantly veered to the left; the light vehicle tipped slightly to the right, and with that Inez went toppling headforemost over the low, leathern mud guard, and Priscilla was alone. Still clinging to that left rein, she swung her discomfited steeds in broad, big circle, narrowly scraping yet safely missing the edge, and so, gradually,

they found themselves galloping out once more over the prairie and away from the homeward road and back toward that narrow ravine whence two Indians were now lashing their finally captured ponies southward across the valley; and then, still circling, the pygmies discovering that they were heading westward once more and farther from home, their enthusiasm by degrees, therefore, became beautifully less. They slowed gradually down to a lunging canter, then to a shame-faced trot, and finally, with Priscilla in complete control of both reins, her own head and theirs, they were brought at a decorous gait back to the road and the point where their mistress had quit them—and the lady had disappeared.

Guiding them carefully down the short declivity to the water's edge, Priscilla came upon a not unlooked-for explanation. Sandy's horse had disappeared. His owner was kneeling at the edge of the rippling waters, bending over a lovely, prostrate form, alternately sprinkling and fanning the dusty, pallid, but beautiful face, then dropping his hat to chafe the limp little hands. With eyes full of terror he glanced up at his cousin. With a voice half-choked with dread, he called to her, "Let those little brutes go, Pris, and come here quick!" But Priscilla, with wisdom untrammelled by passion and dread, lashed their bits to a tree trunk before she would quit her charges, and by the time she reached the interesting group at the water's edge the dusky head was pillowed on a tan-colored knee, and further supported by a tan-colored

arm, and the loveliest dark eyes in the world, just unclosing, were gazing imploringly up into her cousin's agonized features. A faint flush was rising to the soft cheek, and lips that were colorless but a moment or two ago, now reddening again, now quivering and beautifully alluring, seemed almost uplifting, as though to reward, to welcome his, as with joy unmistakable they murmured, "Sandy—Sandy—I knew—you'd come."

CHAPTER XVIII

BLENKE COVERS HIS TRACKS

PRISCILLA SANFORD in the next few days, despite the fact that most of her pupils were gone, found her duties increasing. She had seen Blenke, but only through enlisting the interest of his captain, who directed Blenke to call upon Miss Sanford and give account of his stewardship or be sent thither in charge of a sergeant. Blenke appeared at last in the dusk of evening and the depth of despond. He wrung his white hands, he bowed his shapely head in shame. He could hardly speak, such was his humility, but he stuck to it that his story was true. She knew enough of his past (at least she should know, since he had told her so much of it) to believe that he had enjoyed the benefits of travel, prosperity, and education. He had trusted, however, where he should have guarded, and devotion to his fellows had resulted in his financial ruin. A man who owed him hundreds, and had promised to pay, was in Rapid City, and came thence to find him here at the very time Blenke started to find him there. The failure of this man to keep his promise had involved Blenke shamefully. He had borrowed much more than the ten dollars he still owed his benefactress. It was shame and worry, result-

ing in prostration and insomnia, that drove him forth at night, that led to his taking Skid's prescription, for Skid, who was so very grateful for Blenke's conduct at time of the fire, did not, however, come forward with offer of financial aid. He was going to do that, he said, when he got his insurance money, which was still suspiciously withheld. Skidmore gave Blenke Scotch ale, warranted to produce sleep. It at least led to oblivion, the disappearance of his watch, and the train of miserable, disgraceful woe that followed. How could Blenke ever face Miss Sanford again? Not until ordered could he bear the ordeal, even though her letters had assured him of forgiveness and further aid and confidence. As to his being with those Indians, lurking in that tortuous ravine, the explanation was simple. The man who had tricked him, a contractor, was said to be over at the reservation—Indians had so told him. They were forbidden to come to the fort or be seen about Skidmore's. They could only meet him out of sight of the post and its slum suburb. He and a comrade met them to hear their report at the crossing of the old road from Fort Siding by way of Castle Butte to the Belle Fourche country, and catching sight of Lieutenant Ray, riding slowly along the edge of the timber, the Indians had led on into the ravine, where they had hardly dismounted and turned loose their ponies when the phaeton flashed into view around a point of bluff, almost running them down, then running away. Startled as he was, Blenke would have grabbed a pony

and galloped to Miss Sanford's aid, but their ponies, too, took fright and stampeded. The Indians went in pursuit, and by the time Blenke could again see the phaeton it was quietly descending the little ramp to the river bottom, and all seemed well. Then Lieutenant Ray's horse was seen galloping away toward the fort, and that was another reason why he, a poor private, should not presume to intrude when an officer was presumably there. He went in pursuit of the horse. Lieutenant Ray, he said, had never liked him, while he, Blenke, could almost lay down his life to serve Lieutenant Ray.

So Priscilla could say nothing but "Go and sin no more," and come back to the choir, which Blenke promised faithfully to do.

Then Major Dwight was at last sufficiently recovered to be pronounced convalescent, and there had been the meeting with his beloved boy, the first few minutes of which had been witnessed only by Dr. Waring and Mrs. Ray, who presently, reassured by his calm, withdrew and left father and child together. It had been followed by a regular visit each day, limited to less than an hour for the time being. There had been two interviews, Dr. Waring only being present and that not all the time, between Dwight and his wife. From both of these Inez came forth weeping convulsively, to be comforted by Félicie—and a pint of Pommery Sec. That something had been sent to the importunate Farrells the doctor had knowledge, and that something had been said to their daughter to

plunge her in grief inexpressible the garrison was speedily informed. "She should leave him, this angel," said Félicie, "but she is of a devotion, my faith, the most incomparable—the most indomitable."

Then Dwight begged that Mrs. Ray should come to him, and there had been a long talk, a reconciliation, an understanding that brought comfort to his heart and rejoicing to hers, and then as convalescence advanced, and his mind demanded food, Priscilla had come to read to him, and from reading, first rather less than an hour, she was reading daily now as much as two. It gave Madame a frightful *migraine*, said the explanatory and fruitful Félicie, to read aloud at all.

But the projected alliance, the prospective friendship so desired by Mrs. Dwight of the elder—the highly gifted—maid had progressed no further. From the moment of their return from that memorable drive neither party to the proposed arrangement again referred to it. Priscilla, who preferred to call at any other house within the limits of Minneconjou, was now a daily visitor. Sandy Ray, who found himself longing to go thither, could not go at all. His arrest forbade it, and he was asking himself what might be his course were his arrest to end, for a rumor was current at the post that a separation was threatened—that Captain and Mrs. Dwight were certainly estranged. There were those who considered it most indelicate under the circumstances that an unmarried woman should appear upon the scene even as a

reader to an aging and broken man. Perhaps it was, but the doctor smiled approval. The colonel said "Go ahead." Mrs. Ray considered her niece quite old enough to judge for herself. Mrs. Dwight declared it angelic, and Priscilla said nothing at all. Priscilla, who had been prone to speak on slight reflection, had become as silent or secretive as she had once been censorious, for never once had she mentioned to her aunt, never yet had she made known to Sandy, that she had heard the strange words which, with returning consciousness, Inez, the wife of Oswald Dwight, had murmured looking up into the pallid face of Sanford Ray. Yet Ray knew, and soon Inez, that Priscilla had heard and not forgotten.

It had so happened the day of that memorable drive and catastrophe that Sandy Ray, dismounting to the aid of Mrs. Dwight, whose slender and lovely form lay huddled by the roadside, while Priscilla and the ponies started on their circuit, had given no thought to his own steed, which fact enabled that inconsiderate brute to trot away homeward. Then when Inez came to herself (though not to her senses, else would she have said such shocking things when Priscilla was within earshot?) there arose a question of transportation. It was only four miles to the fort, but in his still somewhat crippled condition that was far for Sandy to walk. It was characteristic of Priscilla that she should promptly suggest her driving Mrs. Dwight home at once; then, if need be, sending Hogan back with the horse. Priscilla herself was a famous pedestrian, priding

herself on sometimes "footing" it to and from town, but never once did Priscilla now suggest that Sandy drive Mrs. Dwight or Mrs. Dwight drive Sandy. Priscilla, indeed, behaved with some little asperity as well as impatience when she assured Mrs. Dwight that she had the ponies now under complete control, and all Mrs. Dwight had to do was to get in at once. But this required Sandy's aid and encircling arm. Then when Inez was fairly in her reclining seat, she could not release the hand. "But surely *you* are coming? Your horse is gone! What—walk, Miss Sanford? Indeed, he shall not, and after having carried poor me all that distance." (For a woman in a dead faint Inez was oddly alive to what had been going on.) "You are coming right in here, Mr. Ray!" and she edged vigorously over against the stout structured Priscilla in determined effort to make room for Sandy beside her. So there he rode, saying very little, but tumultuously thinking, Heaven only knows what, for Inez had then eyes, ears, aye—lips, had he dared—only for him. She nestled close and confiding in the arm trembling about her slender shoulders. He felt the contact of her rounded form. His head was in a whirl, his heart was in a tumult, when at last Priscilla reined in at the major's gate, and again Sandy had almost to carry the lovely burden up the major's steps and, with one, long, melting gaze from her glorious eyes, with five murmured words from her exquisite, parted, passionate lips, with a thrilling pressure from both her little hands, he delivered

her into the waiting arms of Félicie, to become again a limp and prostrate being, to require at once her hand-maid's best services—and champagne. The quantity of Pommery Sec consumed in that house during the major's confinement thereto, said Félicie afterwards, was, *o ciel*, of the most incredible!

It can readily be conceived that Priscilla could not soon forget the incidents of that day's drive, the last she ever took with Inez Dwight. What with the apparition of Blenke and the blanketed Indians at the ravine, the run-away of the ponies on the prairie, and the astounding revelation that followed, the honest-hearted girl was utterly at a loss as to her duty in the premises. Six weeks back she would not have hesitated. She would have known infallibly just what to say and do, and unflinchingly would she have said and done it. But, all was different now. Her faith was strong as ever, firm and unshaken, but her self-confidence was gone. She had made some of the worst mistakes of her thirty years within the last three months. She had justly offended her fondest, truest friends; had brought dire distress, untold suffering, on a most loving and devoted father, and cruel punishment to an innocent and trusting child. Her head had been bowed to the dust in self-condemnation, in humility unspeakable. She could have dragged herself upon her knees every inch of the road from their door to Dwight's, and with streaming eyes and clasping hands, a well-nigh broken and all contrite heart, could have

bathed his feet with her tears and implored his forgiveness. It was characteristic of Oswald Dwight,—the old Oswald Dwight coming once again through this hell of suffering and from the very threshold of the other world into the kingdom of self-search and self-dominion,—that he should send for her,—beg that she should be brought to him,—that he might lift from her mind a moiety at least of its weight of self-accusation. It was characteristic of him thereafter that, after the first few hours with his blessed boy—and God alone knows what intensity of prayer, petition, love, and resolve surged through the heart and soul of the almost re-created man—he should try to show Priscilla Sanford that he blamed himself alone, not her; that he honored her, respected her, believed in her, and that he rejoiced to see the friendship that was daily growing between her and his beloved little son. The readings that seemed so long to the censorious were not all reading, after all, for presently and little by little the book would be dropped, the page would be discussed, and, once away from her hobby of original sin and universal damnation—the Calvinistic creed of that stern, pure-hearted if Puritanical woman—there was much that appealed to the stern, true-hearted soldier nature of the even maturer man. A famous Covenanter—a Round-head after Cromwell's own heart—might Oswald Dwight have been had he dwelt in Merry England, where sun-strokes were unknown and dark-eyed sirens seldom heard of. As for Priscilla, she needed but the garb to fit her

for the austere duties of the sect whence sprung her mother and her name. But it was a chastened, softened, subdued Priscilla that now wrestled in spirit with the problem set before her. She knew no woman in all Minneconjou except Aunt Marion with whom to take counsel, and how could she wound, terrify, Aunt Marion with her growing suspicion! She knew but one man in all Minneconjou on whom she felt a longing to lean the burden of her deep trouble, and how could she bring herself to mention it to him!

For within the week that followed the day of that drive and disaster the level-headed soldier in command of the department had been to Fort Wister; had held an official inspection and a personal investigation at Minneconjou; had interrogated and, it was whispered, instructed Captain Foster, with the result that, though deeply injured and properly incensed, that officer, while urging continued effort to bring to justice his unknown assailants, decided it was unwise to press further, for the present at least, his charges against Lieutenant Ray. Much to Ray's disgust, therefore, he was released from arrest without the full and entire clearance he had hoped for, and now, with the Canteen closed and no longer demanding his supervision, with little to do at the Exchange, still unfit for drill or soldier duty, with his soul raging and dissatisfied, his heart stirred anew with strange and turbulent emotion, and his brain in a whirl,—nervous, restless, sometimes sleepless the livelong night,—Sandy Ray had again taken

to riding long hours to get away from himself,—from everybody, as he told his anxious, watchful, but silent mother. (How little did Priscilla dream how much that mother knew! How little did that mother know how much Priscilla dreamed!) And in Ray's avoidance of everything, everybody, he rode never to town, but ever to the west and often to the clump of cottonwoods opposite the mouth of that crooked ravine where Inez Dwight, with the look, the touch, the temptation of the unforgotten days at Manila and Nagasaki, had come again into his life, and whither Inez Dwight, decorously accompanied by her sheepdog of a maid, found means to drive, no matter which way she started, and there or about there, to meet him,—to see him four days out of the seven,—until the climax came.

CHAPTER XIX

AGAIN THE SALOON

FOR a man of philosophic temperament, one who seldom worried other people or himself, Colonel Stone had been having a nerve-racking time of it. He was troubled in the first place about the condition of affairs military in his big command, which the general himself had referred to as "a sad falling off," and which Stone saw no way under the law to correct. The number of men absent without leave, absent unaccounted for, probably in desertion, or absent "in the hands of the civil authorities," had increased alarmingly since the closing of the Canteen. "Skid" and his abominable community across the fords had been doing a thriving business, and were vastly enjoying the situation. Men by dozens who had been content, after their sharp drills or when the day's work was done, with mild and palatable beer, now sat sullenly about their barrack steps in the summer evenings, or, out of sheer disgust, wandered off by twos and threes (and a new footbridge erected by Skidmore), to spend their leisure hours and scanty cash over the reeking counters of the saloon, deeming themselves robbed of a right accorded every other wageworker throughout Christendom, and saying things of their Con-

gress it was n't safe for their officers even to think. They did not so much blame the women who had started the movement that spoiled their soldier homelife—how could women of the Fold be expected to know anything about the conditions on the frontier?—but, said our sergeants and corporals and sturdy men-at-arms, the soldier had a right to expect that Congress would look before it voted. Possibly had the soldiers, too, been voters their side of the case might have met some consideration; but, being politically on the same plane with “Indians not taxed,” it was safe, at least, to similarly fix their social status and restrictions. Forbidden by the people he was sworn to serve, to take his temperate drink at home, but permitted by the same people to drink his fill of fiery stuff abroad, abroad the thirsty soldier went, and with him went many a man who had been content with mighty little, but resented it that he should be discriminated against, denied the right of the humblest citizen, and declared the only white man in America fit only to be ruled as is the red.

The morning list of prisoners at Minneconjou was something over which Stone was nearly breaking his heart. Every night now, in numbers, the men were sneaking off across the stream, lured by the dance music, the sound of clinking glass and soldier chorus and siren laughter. However well the colonel might know his own profession, he was powerless under the law to deal with this question. Here “Skid” had him and the garrison by the throat. With the knowledge that his men were

drinking, dicing, and going generally to the devil within those ramshackle walls across the stream, he could neither remove the victims nor dislodge their tempters. Patrols he could send to search the roads, the open prairie, the river bottom, but Skidmore had declared that no armed party could legally cross his threshold, and the courts had backed him. Soldiers roistering in the roadway in front of the dive would dart within doors at sight of the patrol, and the officer, sergeant, or private that entered there left hope behind of fair treatment in the civil courts. Stone tried sending a big sergeant and six stalwart men unarmed, and they came back eventually without coats, collars, or character, none of them without bruises, some of them not without aid. Stone marveled that so many of his men turned up in town drunk, helpless, and in the hands of the local police, with fines imposed by the local magistrates, but that, too, was presently explained. Skid kept a big, twelve-seated "bus" that on busy nights, as the soldiers got well fuddled and completely strapped, he would load up with the drugged and drowsy victims and, instead of driving them over to the fort, would trundle them to town, dump them in front of some saloon, there to be run in by a ready police, and locked up until sober and abject. Then would come their arraignment and the invariable "Five dollars or thirty days." Then their officers would be notified. The fines at first were paid, until it dawned upon Stone that Skid and Silver Hill, both, were in the swindling combination, that after Skid-

more had got the last cent of the men there was still a way of squeezing more from the officers. As soon as the fort realized the fact the town ceased to realize the funds, and Skidmore was told to send no more castaways to Silver Hill, so he simply turned them out to take their medicine where once they took their comfort—at the post.

But Skid's was a menace in yet another way, and, so long as his "ranch" was far over to the southeast, the fort had not felt it. The noble redman likes liquor, and the low-caste and half-breed crave it. There were always a shabby lot of hang-dog, prowling, ill-favored off-scurings of the Sioux lurking about Skid's premises day and night, bartering when they had anything to barter, but generally begging or stealing. A drunken soldier, sleeping off his whisky in the willow patches, was ever fair game, and sometimes now soldiers were found throttled, and robbed of their very boots and shirts. Serious clashes had occurred, and were of almost daily happening, to the end that officers, out fishing or shooting, had been insulted and threatened by Indians who had sworn vengeance against the soldier, and knew no discrimination. "We'll have trouble from that yet," Stone had told his general, and the grave, lined face of the latter showed how seriously he regarded the possibility. Sandy Ray, riding far out to the southwest one summer day, had met a brace of young braves who insolently ordered him to turn back or fight, and this when he had not so much as a pocket pistol or an inkling that trouble was brewing. Knowing

a little of their "lingo," and something of the sign language, he demanded an explanation, and got for answer that two of their brothers had been worsted in conflict with him and his party. Sandy protested he had had no trouble with any of their people, and got a prompt answer, "Fork tongue!" "Liar!" and other expletives not printable, and he turned back before their revolvers, wrathful, helpless, and wondering. He told his tale to the colonel, and Stone looked solemn:

"Sandy," said he, "you—take chances riding out that way. I—I've been getting anxious about you—have been on the point of speaking—before." Whereat Ray suddenly went crimson, through his coat of sun tan, and bit his lip to control its quiver. "There's mischief brewing with those people, I fear. Their agent has written me twice. One drunken brawl at Skid's has led to clashes where whisky was n't the inciting cause. He says two of his young men were set upon by some of our troopers here, and it is n't safe to meet them alone. Indeed, Sandy, I wish you'd ride in—some other direction."

It was what his mother had very gently said to him but yester morning, before he had heard of any sign of Indian trouble. How *was* he to hear, since he seemed to avoid the society of his kind and to prefer to live alone? Ray left the colonel's presence with his nerves a-tingle. Had it come to this then, that his father's old friend should say to his father's son that—he was riding the wrong way?

Yes. This was another matter that was giving Stone sore trouble. Mrs. Stone was a woman who paid, ordinarily, little heed to garrison talk. She and her colonel were the best of chums, and one reason was that, even when she heard she would never carry to him the little spiteful rumors often set astir by the envious or malicious. When, therefore, Mrs. Stone came to him with a story at the expense of man or woman, the colonel knew there was something behind it. Now, though Mrs. Dwight's pretty phaeton usually *started* eastward, it speedily "changed direction." The country about Minneconjou was very open, almost all rolling, treeless prairie, and its hard, winding roads could be seen criss-crossing the gray-green surface in many a mile. It seemed wicked that Mrs. Dwight should care to stay out so long when her husband had been so very seriously ill and was still confined to his room. Even though he did not desire her presence, and was sore angered at and presumably estranged from her, Minneconjou said she ought not to be abroad, especially if it involved her meeting a young officer once thought to have been deeply smitten with her charms. True, no one had seen them together except from a long distance, and then it appeared that the horseman rode for a few moments only by the side of the pretty equipage. But, for what else could she go thither, and why, if bent on going thither, should she thrice start by way of the east gate and then make long, wide circuit of the prairie roads?

Mrs. Stone had heard enough to convince her she ought to speak to Mrs. Dwight, but first she must consult her husband. Stone had heard just enough to convince him he ought to speak to Sandy, when they had their conference, this admirable couple, and that day he spoke.

And that day, as it happened, Sandy Ray had ridden home, saying to himself "this must be the last."

One morning, the first meeting since that of the runaway, she had surprised him mooning at the cottonwoods, his horse tethered and cropping the bunch grass, he himself stretched at length at the edge of the stream lost in deep and somber reflection. Just where she expected, there she found him, but not as she expected. In spite of her effusiveness the day of the drive, he was grave, distant, unresponsive, though she sat beaming on him from the phaeton, Félicie beside her, an unhearing, unheeding, uncomprehending dummy. The next time Inez took the air in that direction she saw him afar off, and he her, and rode away. That evening she promenaded quite an hour on her veranda, and later he got a little missive:

Will Mr. Ray, if not too busy, come to me one moment? There is a matter on which I much desire his aid.

(Signed) INEZ DWIGHT.

Ray was slowly crossing the parade, after an hour at the sergeants' school. He could not stay home, where mother might possibly ask the questions she sometimes

looked, but he need not have feared. Dwight's one soldier groom came speeding with the note and the word, "Mrs. Dwight's at the gate now, sor." And at the gate she was, in diaphanous muslin or *piña* or *justi*—how should a man know? Ray neither knew nor cared. His head was set against her, though his heart was throbbing hard. He had listened just one day to her soft speeches, quivered under her melting glance, and thrilled under her touch. Then he saw his danger and swore he would shun it, coward or no coward. On that following day, afar up the valley, he had set his face against her when she came in search of him. Now he could not so affront her, though she had tricked and affronted him. Again he was civil or coldly courteous, but he held aloof and would not see her extended hand, whereat her underlip began to tremble, and she laid her hand upon his arm.

"Am I *never* to have a kind word, Sandy?" she pleaded, and there was intoxication in the glance, the touch, and trembling lip. "Will you never listen to my story, and know how I was tricked—how—how I lost you?"

And bluntly he had answered, "I do not care to know. If that is all you wish to see me about, good-night," then turned and left her. He was raging at the thought of her flirtation with Foster. He could not forgive that, though for a few hours, in the amaze, bewilderment, and vague delight with which he had heard her waking

words, and read the alluring message in her eyes, and felt the warm throb of her heart, almost against his, as they homeward drove, with Priscilla stern and silent at the reins, he had forgotten. He had been carried back, in spite of all, to the thrill and glamour of those wondrous days and almost deliriously blissful nights, sailing over moonlit summer seas, wandering under starry summer skies, with the soft breeze laden with the perfume of the cherry blossoms stirring her dusky hair and blowing it upon his warm young lips. But that was far, far in the past now. He could have listened, *might* have listened, but between her pleading eyes—those beautiful, uplifted eyes—and him there stalked the effigy of Stanley Foster, with that sneering, smiling, insolent, triumphant, possessive look upon his evil face; and, though Ray hated, it was what he needed. Let it be remembered of him, then, that in the stillness of the summer night when they two stood almost face to face and utterly alone, despite her restraining hand, her beseeching touch and tone, he turned sturdily away.

But alas for human frailty, that was not the last appeal! The summer night was young, there was a soft wind blowing from the wrong direction, the southeast, and the strains of music, mellowed and tempered by distance, had been wafted forwards from beyond the stream, soon to give way to louder, harsher strains, and be punctuated by jeering laugh or drunken yell. It was barely ten o'clock, yet the broad walk and many a veranda along

the row seemed deserted. Walking stiffly homeward, Ray met only one couple, and never heeded a hail or two from vine-screened porches. He was in no mood for chat or confidence. He wished to reach his own room, and reach it unmolested. He breathed a sigh of relief that there was no one to detain him as he neared his own doorway. The little parlor, too, was deserted. Mother and Priscilla had apparently gone to some one of the neighbors. The lights were turned down on the lower floor and all was darkness above. Doors and windows, army-fashion, stood wide open, and, as he struck a match on reaching his little room, the white curtains were fluttering outward under the stir of the gentle air that swept through from the hall. He had no thought of staying. He meant to leave his books and papers, to bathe his face and hands, for they seemed burning, and then—he had no definite plan; he only wished to be alone.

At the foot of the stairs, as he reached the lower hall, he heard his mother's voice. She was at the gate, Priscilla and Captain Washburn, too, and Sandy turned, tiptoed through the hall, the dining-room, the deserted kitchen, for the domestics had gone gossiping about the neighborhood. Back of the kitchen, in the narrow yard, ran the one-storied shed, divided by partitions into laundry, storeroom, coal and woodshed, and Hogan's sleeping-room and sanctuary, and a dark form issued from Hogan's doorway at the instant that Sandy, tiptoeing still, came forth from the kitchen. "Hogan!" he

hailed, but it was not Hogan. It was someone of his own size and build, someone who started, then stopped short and faced him with punctilious salute.

"It is Blenke, sir."

"And what the devil are you doing—there?" demanded Ray, suspicious, irritated, nervously angered against everything, everybody; never, moreover, approving of Blenke, and knowing well how Hogan disapproved of him.

But Blenke's voice was gentle melancholy, mingled with profound respect.

"Looking for Hogan, sir. I had promised Miss Sanford to return some books. I did n't presume to enter the house, and thought to leave a message with him. I desired, too, to see the lieutenant, sir. My application for transfer to the cavalry has been disapproved, and—I hoped that he might say just a word to help me."

"After that exploit of yours—last month?" And Ray's eyes grew angrier yet. "We have too many questionable characters as it is."

"Lieutenant," spoke the soldier, almost imploringly, "I am doing my best to live down that—most deplorable affair. I was drugged, sir. There can be no other explanation, but my captain still holds it against me, and at the very time I most needed to be here, he has picked me out for detached duty—to go to the wood camp in the Sagamore to-morrow."

And at the instant Priscilla's crisp, even tones were

heard at the rear door. "Oh, Blenke? I *thought* I knew the voice. One moment and I'll strike a light!"

And in that moment Sandy made his escape.

His mother was sitting up waiting for him when, an hour later, he came in. Tenderly, fondly, she kissed him, and for a moment he clung to her. Then, looking in her face, he saw impending question.

"Not—not to-night, mother, darling," he hurriedly spoke. "I *do* want to talk with you—to tell you, but not to-night. Bear with me just a day or two, and"—then again his arms enfolded her—"trust me."

Her silent kiss, her murmured blessing, was his good-night. Then she went slowly to her room, leaving him to extinguish the lights and close their little army home to await the coming of another day.

But, somewhere about twelve there was trouble down toward the fords, and Sandy, in no mood for sleep, went forth to inquire. The sentry on No. 3 was standing listening to the distant jumble of excited voices. "I don't know what it was, sir. They took some fellow up to the guard-house, and they're hunting the willows for more." Then No. 4, behind them, set up a shout for the corporal, which No. 3 echoed, and Sandy, not knowing what to expect or why he should go, trudged westward up the sentry post and found No. 4 fifty paces beyond the last quarters, the major's, and wrathful because "some fellers," he said, had sneaked in across his post. The corporal came panting on the run, and Ray scouted on along

the bluff, saw nothing, found nobody, turned to his right at the west gate, glanced upward where the night light burned dimly in the patient's room, at the closed blinds and shades of the room he knew to be hers, and all was hushed and still within the sleeping garrison as a second time he walked slowly homeward along the row, unseen of anybody, probably, from the moment he left the corporal and No. 4, who had some words over the sentry's report, and parted in ill humor. "Don't you yell for me again until it's business, d'ye hear?" was the corporal's last injunction.

Less than fifteen minutes later No. 4 was startled by a sudden sound—a woman's half-stifled scream, followed by commotion at Major Dwight's.

CHAPTER XX

A MOTHER'S DREAD

LITTLE JIM came over somewhat earlier than usual in the morning. He had returned to his own room adjoining his father's as soon as the physicians deemed it wise to permit, and the permission was given earlier than others might have deemed wise because the doctors, both senior and junior, agreed that Dwight's recovery would be retarded if the boy were not close at hand, with his fond smile and caressing touch, eager to answer the faintest call. There was something more than pathetic in the way the somber deep-set eyes of the weak and broken man, so infinitely humbled in his own sight, now followed Jimmy's every movement about the room, and as soon as Dwight was strong enough to leave his bed for a moment at a time he would be up again and again during the night hours to gaze into Jimmy's sleeping face, to softly touch his hand or forehead. Stratton, of the hospital force, detailed for duty with the major, told later how the big tears would gather in the major's eyes as he bent over the unconscious sleeper; how, many a time he would find the major kneeling by the bedside, his lips moving in prayer. Marion's eyes welled over when this was told her, though

it could hardly have been news. She and all who knew him in the old days must have known how, with clearing faculties, the strong and resolute man would suffer in the consciousness of the cruel wrong he had done his boy, must have realized the depth of his contrition, and probably guessed with fair accuracy the intensity of his grieving and of his thoughts of her—the wife he had so utterly loved, so sadly lost—Margaret, the devoted mother of his only son.

And realizing this, there had come a vital question to the mind of Marion Ray. What was to be now the father's attitude toward this girl-wife—she who had been set in Margaret's place, never for a moment to fill it? All Minneconjou was asking itself what would be her status, this beautiful young creature, when reason fully resumed its sway and Dwight was once more able to assume the reins of domestic authority? Thus far all that was known was that estrangement existed. She, herself, had sobbingly told her story to eager if not always sympathetic souls. "He turns from me almost in loathing—he for whom I would gladly die!" was her melodramatic utterance to one of her hearers, and it was quite enough to start the story that there would certainly be a separation just so soon as Dwight could effect it. Meantime, Inez had ever her faithful Félicie, her phaeton, her flowers from town, her lovely gowns and fluffy wraps, her long hours abed after sun-up, her late hours and suppers, concerning which kitchen cab-

inets of officers' row had superabundant information, and a certain firm in Silver Hill a swift-growing account, on the face of which the item, "Case Pommery Sec, Pints," appeared with a frequency suggestive of supper parties of several people instead of only one or two. The domestics at the Dwights' were a disloyal lot, if Félicie's views were accepted, but as members of the establishment they resented it that the "frog-eating Feelissy" should dare to give them orders. "Madame much objected to their late hours." "It was Madame's wish they should be in their rooms by eleven o'clock, and that even when there was a dance they should be home by twelve." Their rooms were under the low mansard, on what might be called the third floor, and a back staircase led from the kitchen to the upper regions; therefore, there was no need of their entering the dining-room late at night. Still, they saw no reason why a bolt should have been placed on the door. They said improper things at the advent of that obstruction during Foster's brief visit, and, after his unlamented departure, the spare bedroom on the lower floor, assigned to that distinguished officer, had been most ostentatiously aired. Foster's consumption of cigarettes was something abnormal, two receivers being sometimes left in the dining-room over night, both well burdened with ashes and discolored ends—the only tips, by the way, the parting guest, apparently, had time to leave.

No, those servitors had rebelled at heart against both

mistress and maid, but the master's dictum had for a time enforced obedience. Now, however, they were in almost open revolt. "It was her that drove him crazy or he'd never have beaten Master Jimmy!" was the comprehensive verdict. Yet housewives who heard their tales and reported them to their lords met sometimes with rebuff. "Growl because they're sent to bed at eleven o'clock, do they? They'd growl the harder if ordered to sit up till then," was one way the unresponsive husband had of settling the story. But wives, who are wiser in the ways of the domestic world, felt sure there was something coming to explain it all, and something came—though, so far from explaining, it seemed to make matters all the more thrillingly inexplicable.

Jimmy, as has been said, came earlier. Daddy had been up quite a while during the night and the doctor had come over before sick call. Mamma was n't quite well, and Doctor Wallen had directed that daddy be undisturbed and left to sleep, if possible, during the morning. Mamma, of course, never came to breakfast at all now. She had her chocolate in her room, prepared by Félicie, and seldom appeared until long after Jimmy was out of the house. Indeed, he seldom now met mamma at all, this in spite of the fact that, since the major's seizure, mamma had declined all invitations to dine or sup elsewhere, and such invitations had ceased coming, when now with entire propriety she might accept, if with entire propriety invitations could be ex-

tended. Minneconjou society was nearly unanimous in the view that, so long as her husband saw no impropriety in the lady's conduct, she must be bidden. Now that he only saw her in the presence of the doctor or the nurse, and she had for two weeks declined to attend, there was warrant for the omission of her name from social functions. Jimmy lunched either at Aunt Marion's, with some of his friends, or had a chosen chum to lunch with him at home. Anything Master Jim desired the kitchen cabinet accorded without demur. He dined for the present with Aunt Marion, or "had his rations," as he said, when daddy was served at seven.

Mamma, attended by Félicie, dined later, in her accustomed state. Mamma's appetite was very delicate and had to be stimulated, he said with unconscious truth, and this morning, this particular morning, he had had to wait for his breakfast. There was some kind of a squabble between Félicie and the folks in the kitchen. He could n't understand it. They did n't like her having beaux around late at night—swore they'd seen a fellow prowling about there two or three times, and only just missed nabbing him at the foot of the back stairs last night, and Félicie was white with rage. She said Butts, the groom, was a *cocaine* (though *he* never kept any, and Félicie did) and she called the cook *coshon*, and scolded both for having disturbed daddy. Daddy got as far as the back stairs with his revolver, they said,

before the nurse could get him back, and they swore it was n't their doing, but hers—her scream that woke him, and even the sentry heard it out on No. 4 and yelled for the corporal, and they nearly caught somebody that hid in the woodshed, and "was n't it funny, I never heard a thing!" and then Jimmy stopped short, for Priscilla had stepped to Aunt Marion's side at the little desk, and Aunt Marion was very pale. Priscilla had thrown him one warning glance, as though to say "Hush." But Aunt Marion asked a question.

"What time did this happen, Jimmy?"

"Why, after twelve, the nurse told the doctor. But, *was n't* it funny that I did n't hear a thing of it?"

"Hear what, Jimmy?" said a voice, and Sandy, an hour late for breakfast, stood at the open door.

"Go fetch some water, quick!" said Priscilla, and Jim went like a shot, for Sandy Ray stood just one moment, pallid and uncomprehending, then, with a cry, sprang to his mother's side, for her eyes had closed, her head was drooping on Priscilla's arm. "Don't touch her, Sandy! Let me—— It's—it 'll be over in a minute! She has had one or two little turns like this!" And then Jim came running with a brimming glass. Mrs. Ray sipped slowly, lifted her head, put forth a feeble, wavering hand toward Sandy and faintly smiled. "How—foolish!" she muttered. "You shall have your coffee in a moment, Sandy," but Priscilla, with determined face, stood her ground and retained her hold. "Don't

let her rise yet," said she warningly, her eyes on his face, "and—don't ask questions of anybody. Wait!"

For reasons of his own, Dr. Wallen, after hearing from the attendant of the stifled scream downstairs at 12:25, gave instructions to speak of it to nobody but the post surgeon when he came. He did not see, he did not ask to see, Madame. He did not wish to see Félicie, but that ubiquitous young person was on the landing and the verge of tears. Madame's rest also had been cruelly disturbed by this disturbance the most disreputable made by these *miserables*, the *domestiques* of *Monsieur le Commandant*. Madame not until after dawn had been able to repose herself, and as for Félicie, "me who you speak," nothing but the pathetic condition of Madame could persuade her to remain another day in a such establishment, wherein she, the experienced, the most-recommended, the companion of high nobility, the all-devoted, had been subject to insolence the most frightful——" at which point the rear door to the landing opened, and in came cook, all bristling for combat, and the wordy battle would have reopened then and there but for Wallen's stern, "Silence, both of you! Pull each other's hair to your heart's content in the cellar, but not one word here." Then hied him homeward.

When the senior surgeon came over later, the patient was sleeping, and, after hearing that Wallen had been there, he left without interrogating the nurse. All

seemed going well, so Waring had nothing of especial consequence to tell the colonel when dropping in at the office later.

Even the officer of the day, in response to the question, "Anything special to report, sir?" failed to make the faintest mention of the excitement reported by No. 4 as occurring soon after twelve. But it was no fault of the officer of the day. He had other and, presumably, far more important matters to mention first, and by the time he had told that two sergeants, three corporals and a dozen men had been run in by the patrols, many of them battered, most of them drunk, and all of them out of quarters, out of the post and in the thick of a row over at Skid's; that one of the guard had been slashed with a knife in the hands of a half-breed; that the patrol had been pelted with bottles, glasses and bar-room bric-a-brac; that Lieutenant Stowe had been felled by a missile that flattened the bridge of his nose, and that the prison room was filled to the limit, the colonel would hear no more. He ordered his horse and a mounted orderly, strode to the guard-house to personally look over the prisoners, then set forth to town in search of the sheriff.

So the old officer of the day and the old guard were relieved and went about their business, and while the colonel was closeted with civilian officials in town a new story started the rounds at Minneconjou—a story that only slowly found its way to the officers' club or quarters,

for, if the commanding officer did n't care to hear it, Captain Rollis, the old officer of the day, cared not to refer to it, but there was one set of quarters besides that of Major Dwight's in which some portion of the story, at least, had been anticipated.

Unable to sleep, filled with anxiety about her firstborn, Marion Ray after midnight had left her room and stolen over to his, hoping vainly that he might have made his way thither. But the bed was undisturbed, the room was empty. Then she thought perhaps he might have fallen asleep in an easy-chair in the parlor; but the parlor, too, was empty, the lights turned low. The front door was closed for the night and bolted, so she went to the kitchen and found the back door ajar. Somewhere out on sentry post there was for a moment a murmur of voices, then silence fell again, except for distant sounds at the ford—sounds to which they were becoming accustomed, though still unreconciled.

For a while she waited irresolute, vaguely distressed, then, finally, returned to the upper floor and once again entered Sandy's room and gazed wistfully about her. All was darkness, but the faint flutter at the west window told her the light curtain was blowing outward, so she went thither, drew it in and fastened it, then stepped to the other opening to the south and looked out over the dark valley of the Minneconjou, the sharp ridge that spanned the far horizon, and the brilliant, spangled sky above. And while she gazed, she listened, hoping every

minute to hear the sound of his coming, even though it was no longer the light, quick, springy step that before his wound was so like the step she so well remembered—his father's, in the old days of the —th. She was just turning away disappointed when far up at the west she heard the shrill cry, "Corporal of the guard, No. 4!" heard the prompt echo of No. 3, the more distant calls of 2 and 1, and, even before these last, had heard the swift footfalls of the summoned guardian taking the short cut across the parade. Two—three minutes she waited, listening for the explanation. Vaguely, dimly, she could make out the form of No. 3 standing at the edge of the sloping bluff, listening, apparently, like herself, for explanation of the call. None came. Then the sentry stepped swiftly along his post in the direction of the sound, as though something further had caught his eye or ear. Then he was lost to view, and still she waited. Then she heard a voice that was probably the sentry's, low and indistinct, yet like the challenge and the "Advance for recognition." Then, a moment later, a hurried footfall, almost at a run—a halting, uneven footfall, as though one leg was not doing its share, and that then surely meant Sandy, and Sandy would know all that had passed and would tell her. Yes, there he came, so vague, so shadowy, now that, had she not heard the sound, she would not have looked for the shadow. She saw the dark form dive quickly through the gate, then pause. Instead of coming further, Sandy had

stopped and, leaning at the gate-post, was peering up along the fence line outside. How unlike Sandy that seemed! Why should her son seek shelter and then turn and look back from a safe covert along the path he came? Something urged her to softly call his name, but, with a moment's thought, she decided against that. She would go down, meet him, welcome him, see if there were not something he needed, see him to his room, kiss him again good-night; and so she took her candle to the lower floor, left it on the dining-room table, and finally reached the rear door, even as her son came slowly up the steps. At that instant began at the guard-house the call of half-past twelve.

CHAPTER XXI

LOVE'S LAST APPEAL

GOING, as usual, next day to read an hour or so to the invalid major, still under injunctions not to tax his eyes, Miss Sanford became conscious of an undercurrent of something akin to sensation, something approximating unusual excitement. Both doctors had earlier been there, and Wallen came again. The hospital attendant seemed abnormally anxious and officious. Félicie, infelicitously named, if it was her name, fluttered upstairs and down, in and out of my lady's chamber, effusively greeting the neighbors who somewhat significantly began coming in with anxious inquiry, tender of sympathy, etc. "Could n't help noticing the doctor had been over three times, so fearing the major might have had a turn for the worse," etc., etc., but it was n't the man so much as his wife of whom they hoped for tidings. But Félicie could fence, and would not favor even the adroit with the desired information. Madame was still reposing herself. Madame would assuredly promenade at horse or in vehicle later. Madame adored the fresh, free air, and though Madame was desolate that, alas, her physicians, these medicines, adjured her that it was the most important she should

at this time live hours in the air and sunshine, and she was forbidden the bliss of sharing her husband's confinement and alleviating his ennui, it was for his sake more than her own and for the sake of their cherished hope that she meekly yield to their mandates; and was it not a circumstance the most felicitous that the charming Mademoiselle should be so ever-ready to read to Monsieur the Commandant?

With all its graceful, polished pleasantries at the expense of the unmarried sister of thirty and upwards, the social world that professes to regard her matrimonial prospects as past praying for, and herself as oddly unattractive, is quick to take alarm when, apparently accepting their unflattering view, she likewise accepts duties denied, as a rule, to those who are attractive. The very girls who giggled behind "Aunt Priscilla's" back and pitied her undesired lot were promptly and properly aggrieved that she should prove to be so forward, so unmaidenly. Because the right man does not happen to come into a woman's life until so late, or because the wrong one happened in and won her fresh young heart all too early, it results that many a better, wiser, lovelier woman lives unmated to-day than many a woman married in her teens. Lucky is the man the Indian summer of whose life is blessed by the companionship of such. Minneconjou laughed at Priscilla so long as she read to the man in hospital or the bed-ridden dames in the married quarters; but it shied violently at her spending an

hour or more each day in reading to Dwight, even though the attendant was never away, and Mrs. Ray, with her needlework, was often present. Was Minneconjou already consigning the present incumbent to outer darkness and thinking of prescribing another mate for Oswald Dwight?

Not only did Priscilla note the incessant flittings about the house, but presently she saw that Dwight's attention was wandering. From the adjoining room the muffled sound of voices, in petulant appeal or expostulation, was at times distinctly audible. Félicie wished Madame to do something, apparently, which Madame was determined not to do.

Félicie came once or twice with Madame's devoted love to ask if there was anything Monsieur desired or lacked, and to flash guarded malevolence at Priscilla. Félicie came again to say Madame was recalcitrant. She feared Monsieur had not rested well *cette nuit*, and she wished well to postpone her promenade, but the doctor he had prescribed and Monsieur he had desired that Madame neglect no opportunity to take the air, and would not Monsieur again conjure Madame? Madame was deaf to these the protestations of her most devoted. Dwight rose slowly from his reclining chair and, excusing himself to the patient reader, was gone but a moment or two, and Madame was ravishingly gowned and most becomingly hatted and veiled when, just for a moment, as the day's session was closing and the fair reader about

departing, Madame rustled in to archly upbraid Monsieur for his cruelty in ordering her to take her drive when it was impossible for him to be at her side. "Ah, but next week—next week!"—this, doubtless, for the benefit of Priscilla—"we shall see!"

The phaeton was at the door and Priscilla walked silently, thoughtfully, homeward. Aunt Marion was at her desk, writing pages to the soldier-husband and father in the distant Philippines. The sweet face was looking grave and careworn. There were traces of tears, there were dark lines, about the soft blue eyes, as Priscilla bent and tenderly kissed her. "Do come down and let me make you a cup of tea," she pleaded. "You've been writing—and I reading—long. I'd like some, too. Is—
is Sandy home?"

"Riding," said Aunt Marion briefly, and Priscilla knew.

Ordinarily, half a dozen women would come drifting in to Mrs. Ray's during the summer afternoon. To-day there were none. They heard voices on the walk, voices that seemed to hush as the gate was neared, and only to resume in low tone after it was passed. Priscilla could not account for the unusual depression that had seemed to possess Aunt Marion even when struggling against it herself. At breakfast time Aunt Marion had been unusually silent, unusually watchful of Sandy, who, before he would touch his fruit or sip his coffee, had gone forth to the bench in rear of quarters, searching,

he said, for some memoranda he might have dropped out there at night. He had hunted all through the pockets of his khaki rig, that he happened to be wearing at that time, and to no purpose. He must have whipped it out with his handkerchief, he said—"just that little flat memorandum book" they had often seen him have, with a few loose pages—no earthly use to anybody but him, no great consequence, and yet, after breakfast, he was searching again, and had Hogan searching, and again he returned and hunted all through his room, and investigated cook and housemaid, and again went forth. Priscilla found herself unable to cast it from her mind or to cause her aunt to forget it. Sandy had been gone an hour when she returned, and had said not to wait dinner; he might ride late and long and far.

"But not toward the reservation," he assured his mother, seeing the trouble in her face. "Though I'd more than like to ride over there with the troop and round up those blackguard reds that turned me back."

"Those blackguard reds" were forbidden by their agent to set foot north of the Minneconjou, where the ranchers and settlers and miners were frequent. But still the mother was anxious, filled with dread she could not speak, and even as she now sat, absently toying with her teaspoon, the maid came in with a note. "A soldier friend of Blenke" had just brought it for Miss Sanford.

So Priscilla opened and read:

Miss Sanford will pardon, I pray, the liberty I probably take in presuming to address her, but our plea to the captain was fruitless. He insists on my going with the detachment to the wood camp; so, long before this reaches Miss Sanford we shall have started, and it may be days before relief will come. Meantime, with my assurance that with Heaven's help I shall yet redeem myself in her estimation, I remain Miss Sanford's grateful and humble servant,

P. BLENKE.

Verily, the young man wrote with a pen of the courtier and scholar of olden time rather than the rude trooper. Verily, Blenke was a man of parts—and played them.

"Where is that wood camp?" asked Aunt Marion, with languid interest, relieved, she knew not why, that Blenke should be gone.

"Far up the foothills—west. It seems that lately the Indians have been threatening and abusive," said Priscilla. "That's why the guard was sent. They march soon after reveille, and—he was so unwilling to go just now, when he hoped to arrange matters about his—commission," and Miss Sanford's clear gray eyes, much finer and softer they seemed without the *pince nez*, were lifted again, half timidly, half hopefully.

"How could he expect or hope for such a thing now?" answered Mrs. Ray, with some asperity. "What officer would recommend him after that—that exhibition?"

Priscilla colored. That episode was a sore point, but not a settler. "He said it depended little on the officers, auntie," was the gently forceful answer, "so long as he

had the senator behind him." Whereupon Aunt Marion arose and peered through the one window in the little dining-room that opened to the west. She was forever peering up the valley now, and Priscilla well knew why. The maid again appeared. "Phelps, ma'am, Blenke's friend, came back with this," and she held forth a letter. "He said it was found on sentry post up the bench."

Mrs. Ray turned quickly and held forth her hand. Silently Miss Sanford passed the letter to her. It was an ordinary missive, in business envelope, addressed to Lieutenant Sanford Ray, Fort Minneconjou, and it had been opened. The torn flap revealed the fact that there were two or three separate inclosures. For a moment Mrs. Ray turned it in her slender fingers, thinking intently, then, suddenly recollecting, told the maid to give her thanks to the soldier if he were still waiting. She wished to ask had anything else been found, but that, if he cared to, was for Sandy to do when he came. Then she took the letter to her room, and stowed it in a pigeon-hole of her desk against her boy's return—then sat her down to wait.

Meanwhile the object of so much thought and love and care had ridden many a mile, his brain in a whirl of conflicting emotions. There had come to him the previous night, in the interval between that brief interview with Blenke and the later meeting with his mother, a messenger with a note. It was the same messenger, Butts, the soldier groom, who had only a short time

earlier met him with her note upon the parade. Ray, fleeing from a possible meeting with Priscilla, had left her and her soldier *protégé* together, and slipping out of the rear gate had gone walking up the bluffs. It was not quite time for taps and the sentries to begin challenging. He could have gone through the yard of any one of the adjacent quarters and so reach the front, the promenade walk and the wide parade, but he wished to be alone, under the starry skies. He needed to think. What could she have meant by saying, "How they tricked me—how I lost you?" He had blamed her bitterly, savagely, for her cold-blooded, heartless jilting of him, without ever a word of explanation. It was so cruel, so abominable a thing that, perhaps, even Inez Farrell could not, without some excuse or reason, be guilty of it. And now she was striving to tell him, to make him understand; now she was alienated from her husband and not, so Dwight's own references to Foster would go to prove, not because of this affair with Captain Foster. She said it was her right to be heard. Perhaps it was. If she had been tricked, deceived, wronged—such things had happened—the story was old as the Deluge and might be true, and if true, was it decent to treat her with studied contempt? If she had been tricked into throwing him over—if, if she had been true in saying she loved him, as fervently she swore that last sweet night under the cherry blossoms in Japan, was it manly to—to crush and scorn her now?

He was again, with downcast eyes, slowly pacing the bluff and in rear of the major's quarters when, far over toward the guard-house, the soft, prolonged notes of "Lights out" were lifted on the night, and he almost collided with a man coming quickly forth from the gate. The rear door had closed with a bang but the moment before, and Félicie's voice, in subdued tone, had been faintly audible. The man proved to be the same who had come to him so short a time before, and the mission was practically the same, "A note for the lieutenant."

Ray took it to the west gate and read it under the lamp.

I ask for only five minutes, at the old place, about the same hour to-morrow. I will never ask again, for I am to leave Minneconjou—and him—forever.

Startled, stunned, he read her words. Was it then so *very* serious as this would imply? Was it her doing, or her husband's, that she should leave? Was it possible that he, Sandy Ray, was even remotely a cause? He could not fathom it. He would not rudely refuse. That would be simply brutal. But why could she not see him here at home on the veranda? Why must the meeting be so far from the post—so close to the—clandestine? Mother had said—— Then suddenly he bethought him that mother wished to speak with him, that he had promised her to be home about taps, and, even though he could not, dare not, talk with her to-night, he could and should go to her at once.

He started; then, hearing laughing voices and light footsteps along the walk ahead of him, hesitated. Some of those teasing, tormenting garrison girls, of course! He could not face them. Abruptly he turned again, passed round in rear of Dwight's, stowing the note in a little notebook as he sped and the book in the breast pocket of his khaki tunic. Some backstair flirtation was going on in the dusk of the summer night, not ten paces ahead, for there was sound of playful Hibernian pleading, a laughing, half-repelling, half-inviting "Ah, g'wan now!" followed by a slap. A trim young trooper leaped backward from a gateway to avoid another shock—and met it on Ray's stout shoulder. The collision startled one and staggered both. The Irish lad, all confusion, sprang for his officer's hat and restored it with, "Beg a thousand pardons, Lieutenant," and blessed his young superior's kindly, "No harm done, Kelly," as, whipping out his handkerchief, Ray sped along, dusting off the felt.

And that harm had been done he never knew till later.

He had managed to put mother off until the following day; had gone forth a second time, as has been told; had passed a second time the gate where earlier in the evening she had awaited him. All at the moment was apparently quiet. He had almost reached home when the sound of harsh voices out beyond the east gate caught his ear—more poor devils coming or being dragged home from the hog ranch. Suddenly there came the sound of

muffled curses and blows. Sandy wondered why No. 2 did not call the corporal. He hastened onward and out beyond the gate and came upon the explanation: no need to call the corporal when two were already there, with several of the guard, striving hard to lug peaceably to the prison room a sextette of soldier revelers who resented being either lugged or persuaded. The guard could n't bear to hurt their fellows: who could say but that conditions and parties might be reversed within the week? The row subsided with the sight of Lieutenant Ray, but not until it had prevented his hearing the call for the corporal that came from No. 4. He found the front door bolted when he got back to the house, and, remembering having bolted it, passed round to the rear steps and then—met his mother at the door.

She had even more to ask him then, yet once more he pleaded: "Wait until to-morrow night." So wait she did, patiently, prayerfully, trustfully, until the morrow's night; and then, not so patiently, but, oh, even more prayerfully, longer, very much longer.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LOST FOUND

AT the usual place and about the usual hour" the pretty phaeton, with its fair charioteer and her black-browed companion, drew up that afternoon under such shade as the cottonwoods afforded and waited for the coming of a rider who, starting some time ahead, was now some time behind. Nor did he seem to hasten when finally he came suddenly into view at the mouth of that well-remembered ravine, and rode straight but slowly to the rendezvous. She, the charioteer, exquisitely gowned as we saw her parting from her invalid husband, watched him with dilating eyes, alighted as he neared the grove, walked a dozen yards or so to meet him and by his side as he led his mount to a point beyond earshot of the carriage. "*You* may trust that woman, Mrs. Dwight," said he, "but I do not. I have come at last and against my judgment to hear——"

"*Mrs. Dwight!*" she began, with pouting reproach. "Are we at the hop room, Sandy, or are we,"—and the dark eyes slowly lifted,—"*are we back again at Nagasaki?*"

"We are never *that!*" was the quick reply, as he bent and knotted the reins about a sapling at the brink; then,

suddenly facing her: "I said I should not meet you here again. I have come for this last time solely at your urging. Never until this week have I shrunk from my mother. Never after this day shall I do it again. You say I have wronged you—hurt you—inexpressibly, and you wish to tell me why. Go ahead!"

With that he pulled his hatbrim well down to his eyebrows, folded his arms, crossed one spurred heel over the tan-booted mate and leaned against a sturdy cottonwood. There was just a spice of the theatrical about it all, but he was young, sore-hearted and hurt. It left no support for her, unless she leaned on him, which nothing in his attitude seemed to invite. Inez had no use for folded arms. To her they should be either outstretched or enfolding.

"You are harsh and cold and bitter, Sandy. You make it so much harder for me to begin," she whimpered, pathetically, prettily, like a spoiled child sure of ultimate triumph. "Why did you never answer my letter from San Francisco?"

"I never got it."

"Then even that early he had begun to doubt me and to fear—you," and again the lovely eyes were making play. "And now he hates me, because he himself was a brute to his boy. He upbraids me for that, and—and for Mr. Foster."

"God! I should think he might!"

"Sandy, Sandy!" she cried, stepping impetuously a

pace nearer. "Do you, too—do you *dare* think me so base—me, when at Naples I would not even let you stay—you whom I longed to speak with? Ah, how unjust!—how mean! how cruel! And now, when I am almost friendless, you who professed so much—you are the first to turn from me." Indeed, he was turning, and his face was growing very white again—his eyes were gazing anywhere but at her, and she saw it, and with both her firm little hands seized his left arm as though to turn him back. "Sandy, you *shall* hear me, for I'm desperate, starving, and that man, he—he tells me I lied to him; and I did, I did lie—for *you*! He talks to me of a—settlement—of sending me home. Why, I *have* no home! I have no father. My own was buried years ago. I have no mother, for she has no thought but for him—who has disgraced us all and robbed Major Dwight of thousands and dared to threaten me—*me*, because the major would not send more. Oh, you *shall* listen! It's for the last time, Sandy, and you *shall* know the truth! Oh, how *can* you so humiliate a woman who—who—*Look* at me, Sandy, look, oh, my soldier boy, and see for yourself! They robbed me of you, my heart's darling! They stole every letter. They never let me see you, and they—— Oh, you think this the old worn-out story of the cruel parent and the suffering child, but I *will* convince you!" And now her hands quit their hold upon his arm and tore at the bosom of her dainty gown—tore it open to the filmy lace and ribbon underneath—tore off the driv-

ing glove from her right hand, hurling it to the ground, and then the slim, nervous little fingers went burrowing within. "You *dare* doubt I love you!" she cried, and now her eyes were ablaze, her rich, red lips were parted, her breath came panting through the pearly gate, her young bosom was heaving like a troubled sea. "I told you I had burned your letters—such as I had. They burned them for me, but they could not burn your picture—— *I* did that—I, with my mad kisses, Sandy!" And from its warm nest she drew it, the very one he had given her in Manila, the brave, boyish face in its tiny frame of gold, moist and blurred as though indeed her lips, her tears, had worn it dim. "You will not look?" though one quick glance he shot, then, with the blood surging through his veins, he turned again and covered his eyes with his arm. "Then hear—this—and this," and long, passionately, repeatedly she kissed the senseless, unresponsive counterfeit, and then, letting it hang by its slender chain, once more seized his arm and burst into a passion of tears. Then suddenly, fiercely, she thrust him aside, turned, started swiftly away, took but four tottering steps and, finally, almost as she did the day of the drive, toppled headlong.

When Félicie thought it time to take another decorous look, Mr. Ray was kneeling by that fair, prostrate form, lifting the lovely head upon his knee, one arm about her neck, the other drawing her to his breast, and he was raining kiss after kiss upon the sweeping, long-lashed

eyelids, upon the pallid cheek, upon the exquisite mouth, and presently a slender arm stole languidly about his neck and drew and held his lips to hers.

It was nearly five that evening when the pretty phaeton whirled homeward through the west gate. It was nearly nine when Lieutenant Ray came slowly uphill from the stables and, climbing the short flight to the rear doorway, found his mother and Priscilla awaiting him in the dining-room. He had eaten nothing since a late breakfast, and an appetizing supper was in readiness. He looked very pale, very tired, and to the fond and anxious eyes uplifted hopefully at first, very ill—too ill, perhaps, to note how ill she looked, the loving and tender and faithful one, who long hours had been waiting, watching, listening for his step, praying for his safe return, hoping for the promised confidence. She knew when the phaeton came, though she said naught of it to her niece. Nearly a mile of the valley road could be seen from Sandy's window, where she hovered much of the time until the sun went down. Now she quickly rose and went to him, and with her soft hands on his temples kissed his forehead, for he bowed his head, and for the first time in his life his lips dared not even touch her cheek. "I—I'm about used up, mother," he faltered. "I—can I have some tea? Then I'll get a warm bath, please, and go to bed. Has—anyone been here for me—inquired for me?"

The sudden upward look, the anxiety in his tone, might

well have warned her, but there was something she had to know, something that ever since evening gunfire had been preying on her mind. No. 4's story had spread by this time all over the post, growing, probably, with each repetition. There had been a tragic scene of some kind at Major Dwight's shortly after midnight. Jimmy had prepared her for that much. No. 4 had heard screams; then lights went flitting to and fro, and there was sound of scuffling and running about, and the guard had almost arrested someone who came dashing from the rear gate and was lost in the darkness and the yards below. No, nobody had come to ask for Sandy! It seemed strange that so very few of the officers had even passed that way. Everybody had business at the office, the Club, the barracks, the guard-house; even at Dwight's there had been a sort of impromptu conference, but nobody had been there to disturb them in any way—no officers, at least; but Sandy read the impending truth in his mother's eyes. She was talking nervously, with hardly a pause, as though she wished him to know all she knew before he could speak, and, even as Priscilla moved noiselessly about, brewing his tea and arranging his supper, Marion, the mother, talked rapidly, wretchedly on.

Yes, there was something. The notebook had been found and brought home. She would get it for him. It was right there in her desk. Priscilla handed it, and he almost snatched it from her, swiftly turning the leaves; then, seizing it by the back, shook it vehemently.

A few scraps and clippings fluttered to the floor, but not the paper he needed.

"Who brought it? How did it come?" he demanded, a world of trouble, almost terror, in his eyes.

"Major Dwight's man," she answered, her blue eyes almost imploringly fixed upon his face.

"*Dwight's* man! But how, *how*, mother? Was there no word? Was it wrapped, or——?"

"Just as you see it, Sandy. He merely said it had been picked up and left at the house. He brought it here when he heard it was yours."

The tea stood untasted before him. He had not even taken his seat. Pale to his lips, and with hands that trembled almost as did her own, Sandy stood facing his mother, and Priscilla stepped quietly from the room.

"Did he say *who* found it—and where?" he asked.

"He finally said it was—picked up *at* Major Dwight's," was her answer, and imploringly still the blue eyes searched his face, and for an instant lighted with hope.

"But I never set foot at Major Dwight's—I've never been inside his gates since I called there with you. The nearest I've been was the front gate, and then, *this* could n't have been with me."

"Why, Sandy?"

"Because it was in the breast pocket of my khaki—the thing I wore when we said good-night; but it seemed to grow chilly—or I did. I changed to the blue coat before going out at twelve. Lucky, too, for I had to go

out front and help with some poor devils brought in from Skid's. I saw your light when coming home over the parade and wondered if the row had kept you awake."

"You—came in the *front* way, Sandy?" And the blue eyes seemed to implore him to stop, to reflect, to remember.

"Why, certainly, mother. I was afraid you'd hear me trying the front door or hobbling round on the planks. What brought—— Why, *mother!*"

With her heart almost stilled, with her hands on her breast, with a blanched face and stricken eyes, Marion slowly found her feet, then rested one hand upon the table before she could steady herself to speak:

"Sandy, think! Do you mean you were not—*there* when the sentry No. 4 called; that you did not come hurrying home and stop there—at the back gate?"

"Mother, dear, what can you mean? When I met you at the door I had just come round from the front, from over near the guard-house. The officer of the guard had his hands full and—— Priscilla, quick!"

And Priscilla came at speed, and, after one swift look as they lifted the drooping form to a sofa, whispered: "The doctor! Run!"

And though running was beyond him, Sandy limped in frantic haste, for the mother's heart and health had seemed failing her for weeks, and this was most alarming. Even at ten o'clock she had not fully regained consciousness, but was mending, and by that time both

doctors had come to her, and Mrs. Stone was at her bedside, while Priscilla, calm, grave and self-poised, was answering the many anxious, sorrowful inquiries, for no woman at Minneconjou was loved and honored more than Marion Ray, who, believing the evidence of her own senses sufficient to confirm an ever-growing, dreadful suspicion, had gone down under the blow.

There had been, as was said, some kind of conference during the late afternoon. The colonel, the post surgeon, two or three wise-heads among the field and senior line officers and that indispensable adjutant. There had come quite late an aide-de-camp of the department commander, who had been at Wister and at some investigation over at the Minneconjou agency, who had something to say concerning the state of mind in which he found Captain Foster, which was bad; the state of mind in which he found the redmen—which was worse; and finally the state of things on both sides of the stream at Minneconjou—which was worst of all. Foster's rancor against Ray was venomous as ever, and he claimed to have new evidence, the mention of which made both Stone and the surgeon look grave. The agent's worry as to his turbulent charges was doubled by new events, and he demanded immediate aid. The post guard reports and the ranch-keeper's defiance told all too vividly how the devil had triumphed at Minneconjou. The colonel, the chaplain, the commissioned force, were helpless against the Act of Congress that had taken away their

best hold on the men and turned the men over to the enemy. The situation, so far as Skid and his saloon and satellites were concerned, was past praying for. But there were "some things, thank God," said Stone, in which he could still strike for the good name of his garrison. Foster's new evidence should be investigated, said he, and as for the agent, he should have his guard, and a strong one, forthwith.

"How did you leave Mrs. Ray, doctor?" he asked his medical man and next-door neighbor on the left, as Waring came tramping home soon after taps.

"Resting quietly, colonel. She will do very well tomorrow."

Stone had come down to the gate to meet him. One glance he threw to the right and left, then lowered his voice.

"Any reason why Sandy should n't go in command of a guard to the agency in the morning?"

"No reason why he should n't, sir, and—several why he should."

CHAPTER XXIII

A WELCOME PERIL

FOR such light duty as he may be able to perform," read the order that had brought Sandy Ray to Minneconjou. First it was the Canteen, and under the young officer's zealous management that fiercely assailed and finally abolished institution had been a credit to the post and a comfort to the men. It was not the duty Ray best loved, by any means, but, being debarred by his wound from active exercise, compelled as yet to ride slowly and with caution, he had thankfully accepted and thoroughly performed it. Then had come his serious trouble, and then, when, had he known the stories in circulation, he should have remained to face them, he was ordered away, leaving, like Sir Peter Teazle, his character behind him.

He was ordered to a difficult, probably dangerous and possibly perilous duty, and, knowing this, he could not for an instant delay or demur. It was n't in the blood of the Rays to shirk. Far better might it have been for Sandy had someone, either friend or foe, suggested that his being selected, when he belonged to neither regiment represented in the garrison, was in itself intimation that the stories at his expense were believed, and if that were

true he should be sent to Coventry—not to command. There were young fellows in both the cavalry and infantry at Minneconjou who would eagerly have welcomed the detail, with its chance of swelling an efficiency record. Under any other circumstances there might have been protest, there would have been growling. Now there were only silence and significant looks. Even at the Club (Minneconjou had set its seal against the time-honored, but misleading, appellation “Mess”), where her name could not be mentioned, even in a whisper, the order was accepted without comment. There was a woman in the case!

Ordinarily, under circumstances demanding the detail of a guard for such purposes, post commanders would send a company under a captain, or half a company under a subaltern; but Stone hated to lose a unit from his regimental line. He had sent to the wood camp a sergeant with a dozen picked men—one or two from each of his infantry companies. Now he sent a lieutenant and thirty of the rank and file, selected at random, to the aid of the agent. Of this thirty a sergeant, two corporals and twelve men were taken from the squadron, for it might be necessary to send out mounted men to make arrests, said the agent, and the agency police were sullen over recent happenings. Sandy was notified by a call from the post adjutant about 11:30, just as he was softly locking up for the night. He listened in silence, made no comment, asked no questions, completed his few prepara-

tions, bade Priscilla keep it all from his mother until after he was gone, for rest and sleep were most essential, and at dawn, with dark-rimmed eyes and solemn face, he stole to the half-open doorway, beyond which the night lamp dimly glowed; listened; entered one moment and softly kissed the dear hand that lay so wearily upon the coverlet; looked fondly at the gentle, care-worn face, and then, with firm, set lips, turned stealthily away. Priscilla was up and had hot coffee ready for him below stairs, and possibly admonition, but this she spared him. Oh, if Priscilla had but known what Aunt Marion had seen at the rear gate two nights before, what might she not have said to both! for Priscilla, too, had had her vigil, had both seen and heard and knew more than Aunt Marion even thought she knew.

"It is barely ten miles," said Sandy. "Couriers will be riding to and fro. Then there's the telephone by way of town, unless the wires are cut. Let me hear of mother night and morning, Pris. Now, I've got to go."

She stood at the window of his room an hour later, watching the little command as it wound away among the dips and waves of the southward prairie, until finally lost to sight. This was a new phase to the situation. Priscilla had never pictured the modern redman save as she had heard him described at church sociables, peace society meetings and the occasional addresses of inspired "Friends of the Indian," who came soliciting the sympathies—and subscriptions—of the congregation. The few

specimens that had met her gaze about town, the station and the fords were, she felt sure, and justly sure, but frowsy representatives of a magnificent race. It was only when the agent, himself a godly man, had come and told his recent troubles, after evening service, that Priscilla began to realize how, despite his innate nobility of character and exalted ideals and eloquence, the average ward of the nation was not built on the lofty plane of Logan, Osceola and Chief Joseph. He was quite capable of extravagant demands of his own and of raising the devil when he did n't get what he wanted.

There were other eyes, and anxious eyes, along the bluffs and the southward windows of officers' row. There were women and children, even at that early hour, clustered at the little mound beyond the west gate, whence the last peep could be had at the "byes" as they breasted and crossed Two-Mile Ridge. There were garrison lads on their ponies, little Jim among them, who rode forth with the detachment as far as the railway, and were now racing back. There were even watchers in the upper windows at Skid's, for the word had gone from lip to lip that the Indians were in a fury and meant business this time. But there was darkness, there was silence, there were only drawn blinds and lowered shades and apparent indifference at Major Dwight's. Possibly Jimmy was the only one who had heard. Possibly Inez did not know; mayhap she did not care.

The boy's face was hot and flushed that afternoon,

and he lay down a while, an unusual thing with him, but he had been up very early and out very long and riding in the breeze. All this might tend to make him drowsy. He had come as usual to tell his father all about Mr. Ray's march and the boy escort. A prime favorite and something of a hero was Sandy Ray among the boys about the post, and Jimmy did not know just why daddy seemed so uninterested. Perhaps he, too, was tired. After breakfast Jim had gone to see Aunt Marion, and returned disappointed, and, after an inning or two of ball, which he played but languidly, had come home for a snooze, and found daddy talking gravely with gentlemen from town who had been to see him before, and had queer-looking papers for him to sign, not a bit like the innumerable rolls, returns and company things he had to attend to when captain of a troop. Jim awakened only with difficulty and only when called. He had promised to lunch with Harold Winn, and went, slowly and heavily, but came back soon with a hot headache, and was again sleeping when the phaeton drove round for mamma and Félicie, and he did not know that this time mamma came not to see daddy before starting. He did not know that Miss Sanford came not to read. He did not know just what to make of things when he found daddy bending over him at sunset, with anxiety in his face, and young Dr. Wallen was helping undress and get him regularly to bed.

Mamma and Félicie had come home before the usual

time, and Jim never knew that, or what happened later, until very long after. But something, it seems, had occurred during the drive to greatly agitate mamma, and that evening her condition demanded the ministrations of both the physician and her maid. That night something further occurred that led to much more agitation and weeping and upbraiding and reproaches and accusations and all manner of things his father evidently wished him not to hear, for he firmly closed the door between their rooms. The doctor came a third time, and in the morning, burning with fever and caring little whither he went, Jimmy was only vaguely conscious that he was being gently borne down the stairway and into the open air, and thought he was flying until again stowed away between sheets that seemed so fresh and cool, and once he thought daddy was standing over him, dressed again in his uniform, and he was sure Aunt Marion had bent to kiss him, and then that every now and then Miss 'Cilla placed a slim, cool hand upon his forehead and removed some icy bandage that seemed almost to sizzle when it touched his skin. From time to time something was fed him from a tiny spoon, and all the time he was getting hotter and duller, and the lightest cover was insupportable, and he wished to toss it off—toss everything off—toss himself off the little white bed; and then, mercifully, Jim knew nothing at all but dreams for many a day until he and Minneconjou came once more slowly to their senses, for Minneconjou had been every bit as

flighty, as far out of its head, as Jimmy Dwight, and it had not typhoid to excuse it, either.

The day following Jimmy's seizure, Major Dwight appeared in public again for the first time since his strange attack. He had ever been of spare habit, but now he was gaunt as a greyhound, and his uniform hung flabbily about his wasted form. He looked two shades grayer and ten years older. His eyes were dull and deep-set. His face was ashen. He was not fit to be up and about, said the doctors, but could not be kept at home. Mrs. Dwight was in semi-hysterical condition, requiring frequent sedatives and unlimited Félicie. There had been—yes, in answer to direct question, the physicians had to own—there had been a scene between the aging husband and the youthful wife and, though the details were fairly well known to these gentlemen, they were almost as fairly kept inviolate. But for the voluble, the invaluable Félicie, Minneconjou might have been kept guessing for ten days longer. Dwight spent his waking hours mostly at the Rays', wistfully watching the doctor and pleading to be admitted to the bedside of the burning little patient, a thing they could not permit, for Dwight was still too weak to exercise the needed self-control. It seemed as though he had forgotten the existence of Inez, his wife, the existence of Foster, the existence of Sandy Ray and everybody and anybody beyond Jimmy and those who were ministering to him. Mrs. Ray, once again moving, though languidly, about

her household duties (for Priscilla was utterly engrossed with the boy) had made the major as comfortable as he would permit in the little library below stairs, where he had an easy chair in which he could recline, and books, desk, writing material, but no one to read to him; and, as it turned out, he would do nothing but move restlessly about, listen for every sound from the upper floor where Jim lay in Sandy's bed, and waylay the doctors or anybody who might have tidings. Once or twice, there or at home, he had to see the colonel, the adjutant or his own second in command, Captain Hurst, but the lawyers came no more. All proceedings were called off for the time being. Everything in his mind hinged on the fate of Jimmy, and, one thing worth the noting, Madame and the phaeton went no more abroad.

But if he had apparently forgotten, Félicie had not, the incidents of that stormy meeting, the episode that led to it and the consequences to be expected. Félicie felt that the public should be enlightened and public opinion properly aroused as to the major's domestic misrule. It was high time all Minneconjou was made to know this monster and "the hideous accusations he make against this angel, and this angel's the most devoted myself that to you speak." From the torrent of her tirade, occasionally, drops of information seemed to accord with the rumors dribbling about the garrison. Minneconjou knew that the well-named and impenetrable post commander was in possession of facts he could impart to

nobody ; that he had been questioning and cross-questioning corporal and men, the latter recent occupants of sentry posts Nos. 3 and 4 ; that these gentry had been ordered by him to hold no converse with anybody ; that he had again called up two of the three men incarcerated at the time of the assault upon Captain Foster, and it was now definitely known that these two had both served under Foster in the —th Cavalry, although both now protested they always considered him a model officer and a perfect gentleman. To offset this was the statement of Sergeant Hess, of the Sixty-first, who said he had once served at the same post with them, though not in the cavalry, and knew they bore bad characters and would bear watching. Then he was sent for, and then it transpired that No. 3 of the suspected trio had gone with the guard to the agency, and he, said Hess, had been the worst of the lot. His name to-day was Skelton, but in those days they knew him as Scully. Had it not been that a dozen other men were out the night of that assault, this might have clinched the case against them. It was enough, at least, to keep them under surveillance.

But other stories, readily confirmed by Félicie, were to the effect that Dwight had accused his wife of deliberate falsehood in denying that she had met Mr. Ray at Naples ; of deliberate intent to make him believe Jimmy a liar when adhering to his story that Mr. Ray had come and spoken to her (a dream ! a vision ! declared Félicie) ; of deliberately accusing him of rudeness,

insolence, affront to Captain Foster and herself in refusing to deny he had seen them together in the parlor during church time ("a mere incident of the most innocent," said Félicie, "of which this infant terrible would have made a mountain"). Moreover, the monster had "accused Madame of all manner of misdoings with this most amiable the Captain Fawstair," and Félicie's humid eyes went heavenward at the retrospect; "and of lying to him, her husband, about, *ah, ciel*, that man!" And then to think that he should demand of Madame in her condition that she confess the truth about that midnight affair when her scream aroused the household! It was she, Félicie, who screamed. Madame could not sleep. She needed a composing draught. She, Félicie, had gone down to prepare it, had unbolted the back door, and was passing to and fro between the kitchen and the refrigerator in the addition without, and she could not find the cork-screw, and could not open the—Apollinaris, and Madame had become impatient, nervous, and had herself wandered down; and just as Félicie was returning they encountered at the doorway and, to her shame be it said, she screamed, so was she startled, "and Madame uttered too a cry, because I cry, but it was nothing, nothing!"

Nevertheless, Minneconjou was hearing of a slender form seen skulking along the back fence, hurrying away from Dwight's, and of items picked up at dawn near Dwight's back steps, and of a notebook sent to Lieutenant Ray, who had himself been out searching very early and

very diligently. Then, something or other, picked up early that morning, had been sent to the colonel, for it came with his mail; and the adjutant and the orderly heard his exclamation, saw the consternation in his face, and the orderly told of it—told Kathleen at the doctor's; then had to tell other girls or take the consequences. Then there were these drives up the valley and the meetings at the cottonwoods. People who called to ask after the presumably lonely mistress of the house began asking after something Félicie had hoped no one had noticed.

For in upbraiding Inez, his wife, Major Dwight not once had mentioned her meetings near Minneconjou with Lieutenant Ray, who, as all this was going on at the post, stood facing a condition that called for the exercise of all his nerve and pluck and common sense. The Indian leaders, three days after his coming, had mustered their force and demanded the instant withdrawal of himself and his men, leaving all horses and arms and certain of their charges behind them.

CHAPTER XXIV

CRISIS

THERE had been frequent communication with the agency by courier and by telephone. Ray held the fort, he said, and though there had been some bluster and swagger on part of a few Indians, the agent seemed relieved, reassured. They no longer crowded, bullying, about his office. "They are obviously," wrote the agent (not Ray), "impressed by the firm stand I have taken, and now I shall proceed to arrest the ring-leaders in the recent trouble, employing the lieutenant and his troopers for the purpose, in order that the Indian police may see that I am entirely independent of them." Stone received this by mounted messenger about nine o'clock of a Wednesday night, and Mrs. Stone knew the moment his lips began to purse up, as she expressed it, and to work and twist, that he much disliked the letter. "I'll have to go over to the quartermaster's," said he, "and call up Ray by 'phone. This agency man will be making mischief for us, sure as—sure as the reds are making medicine." But the last words were muttered to himself, as he took his cap, and leave.

Stone had served many a year on the plains, and knew

the Indian, and had his opinion as to the value of civil service in dealing with him. Stone had served two years in the South in the so-called reconstruction days, and in his mind there was marked similarity between a certain few of the Indian agents he had met and an uncertain number of the deputy marshals of the "carpet-bag" persuasion, then scattered broadcast over the States "lately in rebellion." If there was one thing more than another the deputy loved and gloried in, it was riding about his bailiwick, with a sergeant and party of dragoons at his back, impressing the people with the idea that he had the army of the United States at his beck and call. Now, here was a new man at the business over a thousand-odd Indians, many of whom had fought whole battalions of troopers time and again, and were not to be scared by a squad, and this new man reasoned that, because the Indians had been undemonstrative for two days, they were ready to surrender their leaders and be good. Stone knew better.

It took ten minutes to get the agency by way of town, and but ten seconds thereafter to get Ray. He and his guard were billeted about the main building. "What do you think of this idea of going out and arresting ring-leaders?" asked Stone. "You were n't sent there for any such purpose." And Ray answered: "He has gone to a pow-pow with Black Wolf's people, and was thinking better of it after a little talk we had."

"Well," said Stone, "how about the—the situation?"

Do you think they'll make trouble? Do you need more men?"

And Sandy answered "Not to-night, sir. Tell better in the morning."

Stone did not like the outlook, but what was he to do? The agent had called for no more troops, and, until he called, Stone was forbidden to send unless some dire emergency arose, and then he must accept all responsibility, as one or other side was sure to get the worst of it, and he the blame. He went over and told Mrs. Ray he had just been talking with Sandy, who was all serene, said he, and all reassuringly he answered her anxious questions. Then he asked for Jimmy, whose temperature was ominously high, and for Dwight, whose spirits were correspondingly low. Dwight came out from the den, haggard, unshaven, gaunt. Never before had he been known to lack quick interest when danger threatened a comrade. To-night he hardly noted what Stone said about the situation at the agency. He was thinking only of his boy, and Stone, vaguely disappointed, went in search of Hurst, the senior captain, and Hurst looked grave. He, too, had had his share in Indian experience, and liked not the indications.

"I don't fancy the agent's going to that pow-wow. He should have had the chief men come to *him*," said Hurst.

"They would n't—said they feared the soldiers might shoot," said Stone, in explanation.

"Anybody with him, sir?"

"Ray says he insisted on an orderly, so one man went with him, to hold his horse while he talked. Skelton was chosen. He speaks a little Sioux."

"Man we had a while ago on account of the Foster matter?" asked Hurst, with uplifted eyebrows.

"Same. He's at home among the Indians, and some of them like him. Guess he's seen 'em before."

At 11:30, when Stone would have called again to speak with the agency, it transpired that Central always went to bed at eleven—there was not enough night business to warrant the expense of keeping open. At 7 A. M., when again he would have spoken, Central had not come. It was eight before news could be had from the agency, and then it came in a roundabout way, for the line was down or cut or something was wrong far over toward the Minneconjou reservation. At 8:10 the trumpets of the cavalry were ringing, "To Horse!" the bugles of the foot, "To Arms!" At 8:30 the squadron was trotting, with dripping flanks, up the southward slope beyond the Minneconjou, a gaunt skeleton, with pallid cheek and blazing eye, leading swiftly on.

Give the devil his due, the first man to warn the fort that there was "hell to pay at the agency" was Skidmore himself. He had kicked the truth, he said, out of a skulking half-breed, who drifted in to beg for a drink soon after seven. They hated each other, did Stone and Skid, but here was common cause. The trouble began

at the pow-wow. The agent refused the Indians' demands; was threatened; "got scared," said the frowsy, guttural harbinger of ill, and swore he'd arrest the speakers in the morning, and they arrested him right there. In some way word of his peril reached the agent's wife, and she rushed to the lieutenant, who mounted, galloped, and got there just in time to rescue Skelton, who had pluckily stood by the lone white man, whom some mad-brained warrior, madder than the rest, had struck in fury; Skelton in turn had felled the Indian assailant, and, despite the efforts of the chief, who knew it meant defeat in the end, the lives of the two would have been forfeit but for the rush of Ray and a few troopers to the spot. It was the lieutenant's first charge in nearly a year, but he forgot his wound. He managed, thanks in no small measure to the resonant orders of old Wolf himself, to get the two back to the buildings, more dead than alive. He tried to send word to the fort of the new peril, but the wary Indians were on the lookout and drove back his riders, while a furious council was being held at the scene of the strife. From all over the reservation warriors young and old came flocking to Black Wolf's lodge, and the elders were overwhelmed. In spite of warning, entreaty and protest from chiefs who knew whereof they spoke, the turbulent spirits had their way. Brethren had been beaten and insulted in Skidmore's old place. Brethren had been beaten and abused at the new. Brethren had been swindled and abused by that very

young chief of the soldiers now at the agency, and some of his men; and, finally, Strikes-the-Bear, son of a chief, a chief to be, had this night been struck down by the soldier the fool agent dared bring with him. Let the warriors rise in their wrath and strike for vengeance! If the little band of soldiers showed fight, and the chances were that many a brave would bite the dust before the buildings could be fired and the defenders driven out and killed, then offer terms. Against such hopeless odds the young white chief would easily yield. Get him and his men into the open; promise safe conduct to the fort, then let others surround and slowly butcher them, while they, the negotiators, took care of the agent, the assailant of Strikes-the-Bear, the employees and their families. Aye, promise to spare the lives of the lieutenant and his men; say that they might go back to their friends at the fort, but they must leave the agent; they must leave their comrade who struck the redman; they must leave their arms and their horses. Mad as it was, that was the ultimatum of the deputation at the door of the agency at five o'clock in the morning, and Sandy Ray answered, just as his father's son could be counted on to answer, and in just three comprehensive and significant words.

It led before long to a battle royal. It led first to barbaric council and speechmaking, then to a display of savage diplomacy, and finally to the spirited climax: savage science, skill, and cunning, with overwhelming numbers on the one hand, sheer pluck and determination

on the other. The defenders were to fight, to be sure, behind wooden walls that hid them from sight of their swarming and surrounding foes, but that might be an element of danger just so soon as the Indians could get close enough to fire them. Anticipating precisely such a possibility, Ray had set his men to work beforehand. Sacks of meal, flour, and bacon, bales of blankets, tepee cloth, etc., had been piled breast-high and around all four walls of the storehouse within. All the available tubs and buckets and pails had been fresh filled with water and stowed inside. The horses were removed from the stable and turned into the corral. Each of the eight barred windows had its two or three marksmen. The women and children of the whites about the agency were all before dawn moved over into the main building, for when his messengers were driven back Ray well knew what to expect. Ray himself posted a keen and reliable man at the forage shed, and one or two others in certain of the outlying buildings, with kerosene-soaked tinder in abundance, and orders to fire them at his signal, then run for the storehouse; Ray would leave no structure close at hand to serve as "approach" or cover for the foe. So long as no wind arose to blow the flames upon his little stronghold, no harm would result to them, whereas the smoke would surely attract attention at the distant fort and speedily bring relief. Ten days earlier, before seeing his wards in war paint, the agent would have forbidden such wanton destruction of government property. (Ten

days later, indeed, the Indian Bureau might call upon the War Department for reimbursement, and the department upon Ray, but the youngster took no thought for the morrow, only for his men and those helpless women and children). So long as the warriors kept their distance and contented themselves with long-range shooting, so long would Ray spare the torch, but just the moment they felt the courage of their numbers and charged, up should go the shingles. The find of a few small kegs of powder lent additional means to the speedy start of the fire when needed, and now, with his little fort well supplied and garrisoned, with the big fort only ten miles away, with thirty or more stout men to stand by him, with only one man demoralized,—the agent, small blame to him,—and only one as yet disabled, Trooper Skelton, whom Ray had practically dragged from under the knives of the savages, that young soldier felt just about as serenely confident of the issue as he did of his men, and happier a hundred fold than he had been for nearly a year.

Moreover, his dauntless front and contemptuous answer had had its effect on the Indians. "The young chief must be sure the soldiers are coming," reasoned the elders, so before taking the fateful plunge it were wise to take a look. Young warriors dashed away northeastward over the rolling divides, and others galloped after to intermediate bluffs and ridges, but it was well-nigh an hour before the signals came whirling back. "No soldiers, no danger," and even then they temporized. In trailing

war bonnet, his gleaming body bare to the waist, his feathered head held high, his nimble pony bedizened with tinsel and finery, a white "fool flag" waving at the tip of his lance, with two young braves in attendance, each with his little symbol of truce, Black Wolf came riding gallantly down from the distant southward bluffs, demanding further parley. Black Wolf had tidings worth the telling, he said. He had stood the white man's friend and endeavored to prevent hostilities, but since the affair of the previous night all that was hopeless, and now he must stand by his people. His young men, he shouted, at dawn had attacked the guard at the wood camp, and the scalps of every man, still warm and bloody, hung at the belts of his braves, even now galloping back to swell the ranks of their brothers. He urged the young white chief to make no such error as had the sub-chief, the sergeant, at the camp, who had fired upon his warriors when offered mercy. There was still time for the young chief to consider. He was surrounded, cut off from help and home. His brethren dare not quit the shelter of the fort to come to aid him. They would be annihilated on the open prairie, as was the "Long Hair" at the Little Horn a generation ago. This, then, should be the young chief's warning and his opportunity. Let him and his men, save one, depart in peace, leaving everything and everybody else as they were before the young chief came. Black Wolf would await the reply. In resonant periods, in ringing, sonorous tones, the speech of the orator-chief had been

delivered, his deep, powerful voice fairly thundering over the valley, and echoing back from the crags of Warrior Bluff, a mile away to the west. A spirited, barbaric group it made, that magnificent savage with his bright-hued escort all gleaming in the slanting sunshine, full two hundred yards away. On every little eminence, on every side, were grouped listening bands of his braves. One could almost hear their guttural "Ughs" of approval. One could almost count their swarming array. Farther to the south, along the jagged line of the barricade ridge, score upon score of blanketed squaws and bareheaded children huddled in shrill, chattering groups, too distant to hear or to be heard, but readily seen to be wild with excitement. Out in front of the grimly closed and silent agency, with only the half-breed interpreter at his side, but in humorous recognition of the solemn state of the Indian embassy, with two sergeants in close attendance, Ray stood listening, and turned for explanation to the official go-between, impatiently heard him half through, then flung out his hand, palm foremost, in half circular sweep to the front and right—the old signal. "Be off," it said as plain as did the later words of the assistant. "Tell him to go where I told him before," said Ray. "If he wants the agent, or my soldiers, or my guns, or me, let him come and take them," winding up as he faced his antagonist, with the swift, significant gesture that the Sioux know so well: "Brave, that ends it!" and turned abruptly away.

"What did you answer?" whispered the agent, as the young soldier returned to his post. It was the Bureau man's first real clash with his red children, and thoughts of Meeker, a much-massacred predecessor in the business, had dashed his nerve.

"He wanted you and this poor fellow who fought for you," said Ray bluntly, as he went on and bent over the blanket on which lay Skelton, bandaged, weak, but clear-headed, "and I told him where to go—where, by gad, we'll send him if he comes again."

The eyes of the wounded soldier, fixed full upon his young commander, began slowly to melt and then to well over. A silent fellow was this odd fish of a trooper, a man little known among the others and even less trusted. He looked up through a shimmer of moisture into the pale young face with its dark, kindly eyes and sensitive mouth. He put forth a feverish and unsteady hand, while his lips, compressed and twitching from pain, began to frame words to which Sandy listened, uncomprehending.

"Lieutenant, I wish I'd known you, 'stead of classing you the way I—was taught. If I ever get out of this all right, there'll be a story comin'." And Ray wondered was Skelton wandering already.

CHAPTER XXV

BLACK WOLF'S BATTLE

AND then from the northwest, with vast clamor and shoutings and much wild horsemanship, came the reinforcements from the foothills of the Sagamore, where yesterday had stood the guarded wood camp; and then, five to six hundred yards away, in broad circle, their swift ponies at full gallop, scores of young warriors, all in war paint and finery, dashed and darted to and fro, some of them brandishing at the tips of their lances ragged, dangling objects limp and dripping. Black Wolf's story might indeed be true. Far away westward from the fort, as was the agency from the southwest, there had been no timely warning, no chance to send for aid. Overwhelmed at dawn by hundreds against their dozens, the guard had probably died fighting, and the wolves and lynxes by this time were scenting their breakfast and scurrying to the scene of butchery. The savage display had its effect on the little garrison, but—not just what was expected. Black Wolf's young braves might well have had a "walk-over" at the wood camp, pounced in a red torrent upon the unsuspecting party, and, with little loss to themselves, massacred all the hated palefaces. That sort of fighting

the Indian most loves—that in which he can do and not suffer. Now came a different proposition. From chief down to little children the Indians well knew that thirty soldiers behind barricades were not to be “rushed,” though a thousand essayed it, without many a warrior biting the dust; and that sort of fighting, said the Indian, is fool-fighting—lacks sense or science. Bravely and desperately as he will battle against odds when once in a hole, he will not battle at all, no matter how great his numbers, if by strategy he can “win out” another way. What Black Wolf and his warriors had hoped was so to weaken the nerve of the defenders that they would listen to his promise that their lives be spared, agree to the Indian terms, leave the demanded victims, their arms and horses and start out afoot for the fort; then, as was intimated, once fairly out on the open prairie, they could be butchered at leisure, and if the young chief could not be captured alive to furnish sport for the squaws and children of the braves he had defrauded and abused, at least they could have his scalp to hang in the lodge when once again peace was declared. Meantime the warriors, women and children,—all,—they could be off to the Big Horn before the troops at the fort would get word of the battle. Who, indeed, was to tell, with the lightning wire severed, and the whole party slain?

But the warriors wasted their time. Three hours spent in trying to scare were three hours lost to the redman. It was just about eight by the agency clock that in one

magnificent dash, half a thousand strong, the legion came sweeping, chanting, and shouting down the slopes to the south, rode in solemn phalanx until almost within rifle range, then, bursting asunder like some huge human case-shot, scattered its wild horsemen in mad career all over the open prairie, and in a minute thereafter, amid the thunder of hoofs, half deadened by the rising pall of dust, twenty-score in number, the yelling braves were circling the agency, firing swiftly on the run.

Never a shot did they receive in reply. "Hold your fire till they come in closer, and you get the word!" growled the sergeants. Never a match did the besieged apply, for there was still no attempt to charge. It was young Ray's first tussle with the Sioux, but many a time as a boy at his father's knee had he begged for the stories of the old battles of the —th, and listened with quickened heartbeat and panting breath. He knew just how they would circle and charge, shout and shoot,—just what to look for and how to meet it,—and there were only two things about the defense that gave him the faintest worry.

East of the storehouse, barely fifty yards away, was the agent's modest little home, a shelter to the warriors should they decide to turn loose their ponies and collect two hundred strong behind it, ready for a rush in force upon his doors and windows the moment a similar force could be ready behind the shop and stable buildings at the corral. They probably could not force an entrance even

then. They would surely lose many warriors in the attempt. But what they could do would be to rush upon the storehouse, crouch low at the walls and under the floor of the porch, where the rifles of the besieged could not reach them, and then start fire all at once in a dozen places, crawl back under cover of the smoke, and so burn out the defenders. Much as the mounted warrior hates to fight afoot, this was too obvious an opportunity, and presently Ray saw indication that something was coming. No time, therefore, had he or his people for further compunction.

"The shops, first," said he. "Start them at once. Open the corral gates and—get back," were his orders to the young corporal who stood ready to carry his message. "Our horses will make a break for home. The Indians will catch most of them, perhaps, but not all. Between them and the smoke the fort will see that something's up, and—you all know the colonel."

And so it happened that, just as the squadron, already alarmed, was spattering through the shallows of the Minneconjou, a black column of smoke was sighted far away to the southwest, sailing aloft for the heavens, and now every southward window, the roofs of many a building, the tower over the post Exchange, the cross-trees of the flagstaff, the crests of neighboring bluffs,—all had their occupants, staring through field-glasses or the unaided eye for any sign of the far-distant detachment under Ray—for any symptom of any check or signal from the

swift advance of the squadron under the gaunt, semi-invalided major.

Barely three miles out, trotting in parallel columns of fours, the right troop was seen to swerve to the west, and presently in a far-away clump of willows in a deep ravine, found something, apparently, that gave them just a moment's pause. "A human being," said the lookouts with the best glasses, "and they're sending him in." True. Someone dismounted and helped something into a saddle. A sergeant and trooper came presently ambling homeward, leading between them a limp and drooping form. Many people could not wait. They ran out to the bluffs, and were not amazed, nor were they too well pleased, to find the lone watcher at the willows to be none other than that strange creature Blenke—Blenke in a state bordering on exhaustion. Straight to the colonel they led him, where that officer sat in saddle in front of his battalions and ready for a move. He was just about ordering the senior major to follow on the trail of the cavalry, when, followed by curious eyes innumerable, the sergeant with his prize came riding through the west gate.

"Private Blenke, sir," said he, saluting. "He can best tell his own story," and with trembling lips and mournful eyes Blenke began. Things looked so ominous the night before that it was evident the Indians meant mischief. Sergeant French, commanding the guard, decided that the colonel ought to be warned. Somebody would have

to try to sneak through the prowling, truculent warriors, make his way to the post, and tell of their plight. The sergeant would order no man to risk his life in the attempt. He called for volunteers, and, modestly Blenke said, at last he felt it a duty to dare it. He found every rod of the valley beset by foes. He found it impossible eastward or northward to pass them even in the dark. He finally made his way out to the southward and, in wide circuit, dodging and skulking when night riders came hurrying to and fro, he at last managed by daybreak to get in view of the flagstaff, only to find dozens of Indians watching the post and skulking between him and the desired refuge. At last—but Stone shut him off:

“Take two companies, major,” he ordered, “march for the wood camp and see what you can find. You know what to do.”

So again was Blenke, the silent, in spite of prejudice and prediction, the hero of the occasion. They bore him off to be fed and fêted, but he begged first that Miss Sanford might be informed of his safe return. Then Stone, with anxious brow, dismounted, clambered to the tower of the Exchange, where his glasses swept the wide expanse of country and told him the excitement, so vivid here at the fort and over “beyond Jordan” at Skidmore’s, was already spreading to Silver Hill. God grant his rescuers had not gone too late—or slowly!

Slowly at least they did not go, for Dwight, possessed of a very devil of nervous energy, pushed his four troops

at steady trot. Well he knew it would not be long before some one of the ridge lines, successively to be passed, would suddenly spit fire at his advance, and that every device known to Indian strategy would be brought into play in the effort to stay his coming until all was over with Ray's little party at the agency. Physical weakness, personal danger, even Jimmy, his only child, now tossing in the throes of burning fever, he seemed for the time to have forgotten. Hurst, the senior captain, who had counted on leading the dash, reckoned without due comprehension of his major that day, and looked amazed when Dwight had come trotting down to the formation, his grim face lighting with something of the old fire, and sent his second in command to the head of the first troop. Once well out beyond the railway the major ordered a few picked skirmishers forward at the gallop from the head of each of his four columns, other active light-horsemen to cover the flanks, and the wary scouts and marksmen of the Sioux, crouching behind the crests, shook their scalp-locks in chagrin. There could be no picking off of prominent officers at close range, no ambuscading crowded ranks or columns. This chief knew his business, and they might better serve Black Wolf and their comrades in arms by galloping away to the agency and urging one desperate assault. Stopping this fellow was out of the question. The one stand, made just six miles out, resulted in no check to the cavalry, but a dead loss to two of their own braves.

And so it happened that toward ten o'clock of that blithe, sunshiny summer morning, when all nature was at its loveliest along the broad winding valley of the Cheyenne,—all save that cloud of black smoke that soared high into the otherwise unclouded heavens and there flattened out like some gigantic pall,—the bold heights that framed the wide bottom lands, the crags at Warrior Bluff, crowned with shrill yelling, applauding squaws and children, the grim, smoke-veiled walls of the remaining buildings at the agency all on a sudden awoke to the maddening chorus of renewed battle. There had been a lull to the fight. The shops had burned like tinder, and were a heap of smoldering ruins in a dozen minutes. The stampeded horses had rushed away over the prairie, to be rounded up and driven by Indian boys, with keen rejoicing, away toward the dismantled villages, for already the old men and most of the families were in full flight up the valley. If headed off from the hills they could scatter over the prairies and mingle with their red kindred at the other agencies, whence, indeed, came not a few young men to take a hand in the scrimmage. The agent's house, spared until after nine, had gone up in smoke. It covered too much of the charging front, and finally was blown to flinders at an expense of four kegs of rifle powder, borrowed for the occasion from the Indian supplies. Now, when the warriors rallied and charged and strove to reach Ray's wooden walls, it had to be over a dead level only faintly obscured by smoke,

and dotted here and there by the corpses of war ponies lost in previous attempts.

Half-hearted, possibly, at dawn, old Wolf was all fire and fury now. One after another four assaults had been beaten back by the slow, sure, steady aim of the defense, and unless he could reduce that little fortress at once his power and prestige as a war chief were gone for all time, and a good name and reputation for all manner of deviltry in the past was utterly blasted for the future.

Of the defenders only three, besides Skelton, were out of the fight. A chance shot from the Indian circle had pierced the brain of one stout soldier, who never knew what hit him. Others had wounded two of the men, and Skelton, himself, who, in spite of his wounds, had crawled to a loophole to have a share in the fight, was now prostrate with a shot through the shoulder. It was God's mercy and Ray's fortune that that bullet was not through the head.

Water and food they still had in abundance, but ammunition was running low. The men thrust their hot rifles into the nearest tub, and laughed at Finnegan's loud claim for a patent on "K" Company's way of "bilin' wather." Sheltered by the bales and barricades, the women and children crouched unharmed. Corporal Sweeny, who had "swarmed" up a ladder to the garret, in defiance of shots that tore through the flimsy woodwork, called down the scuttle-hole that "the fellers must be comin' from the fort—there's Indians gallopin'

back by the dozens!" And Sweeny was right, and his words carried cheer when cheer was needed, for now began the supreme effort of the redmen, and in one magnificent, yelling, streaming, lance-waving circumference they seemed to spring into view from every conceivable point of the compass, still a good thousand yards away from the threatened center, and, slowly at first, brandishing arms, beating shields, shouting encouragement and vengeance, they bore steadily inward, a slowly diminishing periphery, until they seemed almost to join for some barbaric "all hands round." Then, at sudden signal, unseen, unheard at the agency, all of the eastward semi-circle broke instantly into a mad race for the center, the dust and turf flying from the ponies' heels, the feathered crests and painted forms bending flat over the outstretched necks of the darting steeds, plumes, pennons, war-bonnets streaming in the wind, and every warrior screeching in shrill rage and exultation. To right and left at the same instant the westward warriors broke away, so as to avoid the rush and shots from the selected front, and then, rallying north and south, they, too, rode again into line in time to attack so soon as the first grand assault should sweep by. A gorgeous sight it was to see Black Wolf's chosen braves, a tremendous torrent of savage war, but Ray and his men gave no heed to its grandeur. The sharp, spiteful bark of the low-aimed rifles began the instant the foremost warriors came bounding across the road to the railway, Ray's five-hundred-yard

mark, and here and there as the red surge came rushing on, a pony went down, a warrior was hurled to the plain, but up, and by, and beyond, with terrific clash and clamor, the yelling horde whirled past the fire-jetting walls; and out upon the westward prairie a keen old fighter saw that certain ponies, riderless, went loping after their fellows, and so shouted a word to Ray. "They've dropped a few, sir," and Sergeant Scott begged leave to take half-a-dozen men and rush out and tackle the dozen that had probably crept to the foot of the wall or squirmed through the dust cloud, like so many snakes, underneath the wooden piazza. Well they knew what that meant: Fire—fire as fierce as that the defenders themselves had kindled in the outbuildings, only a thousand times more terrible, for it meant fearful torture and death to these imprisoned ones within the walls, or the certain bullets of the merciless foe when driven forth. But, before this sally could be made down came the rush from the northward, less powerful and spectacular only in point of numbers, and every man of the defense was needed at the loopholes and windows again. Their shots told, too, for Sweeny yelled delightedly from his perilous perch aloft that half-a-dozen were down and the ponies loose; and then could be seen the dash of comrades to pick up and bear away the dead and wounded, a feat of daring and devotion in which the Indians of the plains have no superior. Now the shots of the defenders were telling in more ways than one. They busied so many of Black Wolf's people that the next rush

was delayed, and delays to *his* plan were more than dangerous. Someone had passed a field glass up the loft ladder, and Sweeny was shrieking new delight and encouragement. "Sure's yer born, sir, I can see the byes comin' like hell!" To the mind of the agent, livid and trembling behind his little parapet of blankets, more than enough, perhaps, in the way of hell had reached them already, but men at the windows set up a cry of thanksgiving that faltered a moment at sound of shot and shout from underneath, then swelled again into something like triumph, for Ray had prized up two or three boards from the floor; two or three slim fellows had crawled through the opening and wriggled to the low walls of rough stone which served for foundation, and here and there a would-be incendiary got sudden quietus and his fellows a stay, but not for long. There came presently another superb dash from the southern side that swept by like some human tidal wave of destruction, leaving its wreckage on the hard sod of the prairie, and, alas, its well-nigh desperate fire-workers at the edge of the wall. Ten minutes more and Ray's improvised stockade was encompassed on every side by a ring of yelling, firing, infuriated demons, most of them sprawling flat and shooting low, and the leaden missiles tore through the wooden walls in every direction, and the man who lifted head or arm above the parapet did it at risk of life or limb. Poor Sweeny's glass came clattering down from aloft, and he, poor fellow, striving feebly to reach his friends and partial shelter,

tumbled in a heap at the foot of the ladder, his life-blood welling from his gallant heart. Then—then other smoke, pungent pinewood smoke, came sifting through knotholes and seams, with ominous sounds of crackling and snapping from the side of the long porch. Then, coughing and strangling, the two men who had ventured below forced their way once more through the hole in the floor, a volume of thick smoke rushing up as they were dragged into the room. Then shrill yells of triumph and rejoicing rose on every side without, and then, within, the piteous, hopeless wailing of helpless women and children.

But the end was not yet. Even in their extremity Ray and some of his old hands had noted how nervously the warriors seemed to be watching the slopes to the north-east. There was a long, low wave of prairie that closed the view in that direction to all on the ground floor, and it was madness to go sight-seeing to the loft. If they could only hold out ten, fifteen minutes it might mean life to all, save the two or three already slain. "Grab those buckets, you, and you, and you!" shouted Ray, picking out his men. "Stick to the east front, Scott! Stand 'em off just three minutes! Dip a dozen blankets in the tub—at least you can do *that*, damn you!" This to a cowering wretch whom even the sight of the women, weeping yet working like heroes, had not yet shamed. The fire had been safely, scientifically started in half-a-dozen places under the porch, and already, probably, was eating its way through every crevice. Water could not

reach it, but wet blankets, spread above, would hold it for a while, and others stuffed in the open spaces at the foundation wall would choke it below. Ripped from the floor came plank after plank, and down into the smoke dived both women and men, dripping blankets in tow, while, with revolver in one hand and filled bucket in the other, Ray mustered a squad at the east door ready for their desperate rush. "Through the thick black breath" that billowed up from below the young leader's voice reached every ear, and even children seemed to still their cries and listen. "Now, blaze away as we rush out. Aim over us as we spread these things. We'll drench 'em well before we come in. *Now*, men, come on!"

Out they darted, crouching and bending low, driving a few shots first at the skulking warriors nearest, then scattering along the ground at the edge of the low platform crackling fiercely from the flames underneath. Swiftly the wet blankets were spread and doused anew. Even though they might check the flames but three minutes, three minutes might mean years of life. Then back into the choking cloud they dove, and manned the walls again, ready to shoot down the first who dare rush to undo their valiant work, and the smoke thus pent beneath the boarding billowed hotter and thicker into the long, dim, resounding room. "Burst open the shutters!" was the next order. It was better to die fighting than choking to death—better to meet one's fate in the open than be roasted alive. Through the eddying clouds, with seared,

smarting eyes, Ray and his sergeant could see the crest of that prairie wave long half mile away; and, just as a tongue of flame burst in through the bales at the south-east window, there came a rush of mounted Indians, leading spare ponies by the bridle-reins, swiftly picking up their red marksmen from the sod, and both voices went up in a shout of glorious hope and joy, as here and there and presently everywhere along that prairie wave campaign hats and khaki blouses came popping into view, and then long lines of racing horsemen, carbines advanced, guidons streaming, officers launching well out in front, and all following the lead and signals of a tall, spare, sinewy form. "The major! the major himself!" shrieked the watcher; and then, all peril forgotten, the beleaguered party, men, women, and children, well-nigh despairing but the moment before, burst from their stifling refuge and went, gasping, groping, stumbling into outer air. Last to reach it,—dragging with him from the blazing doorway the helpless and crippled form of Skelton, his khaki coat ablaze, his hat, his hair and eyebrows gone,—came their young commander, and helping hands were drenching him with water as he toppled exhausted on the sod.

CHAPTER XXVI

TRUTH STRANGER THAN FICTION

THERE was wrath mingled with the rejoicing that thrilled all through the garrison that afternoon. Scattering far and wide, the ringleaders, the more prominent braves engaged in the revolt at the agency, were seeking the refuge of kindred bands, leaving the old men and many Indian households to explain the situation and secure eventually the peace always so readily accorded. Placing a guard over the unconsumed property, and sending most of the cavalry in pursuit of the renegades, Stone telegraphed brief statement to department headquarters, lauding Ray and his plucky detachment as they deserved, and Dwight and the squadron as well, for their swift and skillful dash to the rescue. By sunset the few dead, the several wounded and many homeless women and children had been conveyed to the fort, Silver Hill turning out in force, and the Argenta and rival stables contributing rigs in abundance. Major Dwight was again beneath the same roof with little Jim, the father well-nigh as helpless as the fever-stricken boy, for, the excitement over, his duty done and splendidly done, and he himself shocked and shaken by the fall of his horse, shot down almost at the

last moment of the charge, Dwight was brought back in the ambulance and assisted again to his reclining chair in the den. Home he quietly refused to go. Mrs. Dwight, as was proper and decorous, so soon as she could rally, under the ministrations of Félicie, from the prostration that befell as a result of seeing her adored, though deluded, husband riding off to battle without ever a word or kiss to his suffering one, lost little time in coming to implore her Oswald to return to his own room and her arms. But Dr. Waring gravely told her it was then impossible, and persuaded her, deluged in tears, to leave him in peace. Her parents, he said, would soon be with her. They had been telegraphed for, and were to start at once. Every provision should be made for their comfort and hers, and, he added, for her future; but she must understand that for the time being Major Dwight begged to be permitted to give his entire attention to his son, whose case was desperate.

So Inez, veiled and leaning heavily on the arm of Félicie, went sobbing homeward through the dusk of the closing and solemn day, followed by many curious eyes, and was once more within doors before Sandy Ray had been restored to his mother's arms. Not until the last of his "forlorn hope" had been gathered up and shipped back to Minneconjou would Sandy consent to be driven thither himself, to find almost every door at the post open to welcome him except his own, where there were now three or four more denizens than there were beds. Stone

himself was on hand to say that Mrs. Stone had one of their spare rooms all prepared for him, and this, too, in spite of the fact that Stone had stowed away, where none could see, a certain letter that, unexplained, might yet render Sandy Ray ineligible to residence under any roof at Minneconjou for all time to come.

But, unbeknowst to the colonel, the matter of Sandy's billet had been settled beforehand. Lieutenant Purdy, of the Sixty-first, a near neighbor, had met the "conquering hero" almost halfway, with the information that his room was ready for him; his mother had already been in to see and to approve, and there he must make himself at home, close to his own quarters; and possibly Stone was grateful.

There were several things in connection with the day's work for which he could give no thanks whatever, and one of these was the news that finally came from the wood camp. Black Wolf's thunderous harangue of the early morning was not all an empty lie. Only the poor remains of the sergeant, seven of his little guard, and several of the workmen, each body surrounded by empty cartridge shells, mute witnesses of their desperate battle for life, were left of those who had so cheerily marched away; and, Blenke being safe lodged within the post, there were still three absent unaccounted for. Blenke himself seemed crushed by the tragic fate of these comrades whom he had vainly risked his life to save. There was great sympathy expressed for Blenke throughout the

depleted garrison that night. There was talk of his daring essay all over the post. There was whispering of it even in the dim-lighted wards of the hospital, where lay the wounded and the scorched and seared. Possibly it was the torment of his burns that made Skelton toss, mutter, and finally blaspheme outright, but blaspheme he did at each successive mention of Blenke, and, presently, with frightful, spiteful vehemence and virulence. The steward in charge thought him delirious, and Skelton said perhaps he was. 'Twould make a cat laugh and a man stark mad to have to listen to such infernal rot, and this, as in duty bound the steward told to Wallen at his earliest appearance, whereat that wise young practitioner looked long at Skelton and—wiser still before he came away.

With all the official turmoil that grew and throve at Minneconjou in the week that followed, this narrative has nothing to do. The general came and went, and lots of troops and dozens of officers. Even Wister, far to the west, was called upon for its contingent for field service in rounding up the renegades, and Stanley Foster's troop, Stanley and all, came over the Sagamore by special delivery, so to speak, and detrained at Fort Siding, whence a detail sped to the fort for such supplies as were needed, and the troopers marched at dawn, a wearied-looking captain at their head. There was much to do in the field; there was much ado at the fort. This last, which barely escaped becoming official, had to do mainly with these,

our *dramatis personæ*, and may now briefly be recorded, and then our story is done.

The center of human interest, of local interest, at least, was for a memorable week shifted from the major's quarters to those where lay our little Jimmie, tossing night and day in fever that threatened to burn out everything but itself, tended night and day by gentle hands, by devoted women, by one especially whose pluck and patience never gave out, and whose physical powers proved indomitable—Priscilla Sanford. There were days in which they could not induce the father to remain below. His whole being seemed centered in that desperate fight for life, wherein he, a soldier of many a heady fight, could wield no weapon for the cause for which he would instantly have laid down life itself could it but insure that of his only son. There came one awful day in which, as he bent over the stricken form, his lips moving in piteous prayer to Heaven, his eyes imploringly fixed upon the flushed and fevered little face, suddenly a gleam of recognition seemed to flash from the now dilating eyes, and as he and Priscilla leaned eagerly forward, in shuddering terror the writhing form shrank from his touch, the sobbing cry, startling in its utter amaze, incredulity—its imploring appeal burst from the burning lips, "Don't strike me, daddy; *please* don't! Indeed, *indeed* I did n't lie!" And with a groan of anguish unspeakable Oswald Dwight dropped upon his knees and, sobbing aloud, buried his face in his quivering hands.

It was Priscilla who finally raised him to his feet, and Waring led him, exhausted, from the room. From that hour, in which it seemed as though Heaven itself had directed the final lesson should be given, and through him, the patient victim of human fallibility, the boy began to mend; and one day Waring and Wallen, coming forth together, stopped and solemnly shook hands at the head of the stairs and left the chastened father and that dauntless nurse silently communing in the presence of the fluttering, yet reawakened, life the one had so nearly imperiled, the other had so indomitably battled to save.

And all this while there were other lives and other fates and other fortunes almost as desperately entangled and endangered. The general had summoned Stone to follow him afield. It was hard work finding those scattered wards of the nation, those lambs of the flock fled afar from the agency, and Stone left with the fate of his three wood guards still undetermined, for the soldiers had searched in vain. He left, too, with most of his men, while Major Layton, ordered up from Niobrara, took temporary command of the post, Dwight being, as yet, unfit for duty of any kind. Stone was a week away, scouting through the Sagamore and over toward the Belle Fourche, and brought back with him some four-score "reds" of various ages and sexes, and two well-nigh starved and exhausted men, two of French's devoted band, who, they said, had been sent out the night before the attack to build and fire a beacon on the summit

of a tall, sharp, pine-crested height a mile away from camp. French thought the signal might bring help from the post. They never reached that crest. They heard the Indians shouting to each other in pursuit. They made their way farther into the hills and lived on what they had in their haversacks, hiding by day, for the hills seemed full of redskins. They were taken to hospital to recuperate, and meantime, while Stone's battalion settled down again into quarters, and business at Skidmore's resumed its normal aspect, and the guard and prisoners their abnormal number, Major Layton returned to Niobrara after imparting to Colonel Stone a story he had succeeded in tracing back to three sentries, a story he could neither stifle nor throttle, and that he left with Colonel Stone to deal with as best he might; and Stone, thinking again, as he had thought a thousand times before, of that letter in feminine hand, and in his private desk, felt his heart go down to his boots. In brief, the story was that twice during the week a young and slender officer had issued from the rear gate of Lieutenant Purdy's quarters, made his way in the black shadows of the fence-line to the rear gate of Major Dwight's, where once, at least No. 4 could swear, it was nearly an hour before it reappeared.

Stone took council that very evening with Waring, the senior surgeon. Waring had just come from Rays', saying little Jim, though dreadfully weak and emaciated, was surely convalescing—that Dwight, with all his joy, seemed

humbler than a little child. "I believe, by gad, that in his present frame of mind he'd forgive her, that incomprehensible little wretch of a wife of his, no matter what she'd done, if she'd come and ask him now."

Whereupon Stone abruptly said, "By —— he sha'n't! Come in here," and he closed the study door behind them. Within twenty minutes thereafter Dr. Waring had mastered the contents of three precious papers. First, Major Layton's memorandum of the sentry's statements; second, a little note that said, "at the usual place and time" and informing somebody of the writer's intention of quitting "Minneconjou—and him—forever"; third, a note explanatory of the second, and this note was typewritten and without signature:

The inclosed was found in a notebook belonging to Lieutenant Sanford Ray, which had been dropped last night at the rear entrance to the quarters of Major Dwight. The major will know who wrote the inclosed, and should know for whom it was written.

Two nights thereafter, toward one o'clock, Major Dwight, with the post adjutant and Dr. Waring in attendance, knocked for admission at his own front door and knocked repeatedly before Félicie could be induced to appear with the to-be-expected plea that Madame had but just composed herself after nights of sleepless weeping, and surely she could not now be disturbed. Dwight demanded instant admission and, finding parley useless,

Félicie unbarred the door and unloosed her tongue. "Shut up, you Jezebel!" said the doctor impolitely. "Sit down there and be quiet." Dwight was already mounting the stair, and presently could be heard demanding admission to his wife's room. There was whimpering appeal in the response, but the door was speedily unlocked, and the voice of Inez could be heard in tones suggestive of unspeakable shock and grief and sense of indignity and injustice. Presently Dwight came down again. "Unbolt that dining-room door—and the back!" said he curtly to the trembling maid, and when she would have demurred, seized her not too gently by the arm, almost as he had seized little Jim, and propelled her ahead of him into the dining-room. It was significant that the adjutant remained at the front door. It was more significant that when the rear door finally swung open there stood a silent sergeant of the guard, while the waning moon glinted upon the bayonets of certain soldiers on the level below. Félicie shrank at the announcement, yet could hardly have been unprepared for it: "Someone opened from within a moment ago, sir, and darted back at sight of the cap and buttons."

"Bring two men and come in," was the brief answer, and then with lighted candles and a lantern a search began, a search for many minutes utterly without result, though another sergeant came and the officer of the day, and all this time Félicie was begging to be restored to Madame, who would assuredly again be prostrated and in

need of her, and Dwight said, "Let her go," whereat, as was noted, she darted first to her own room, not to Madame's, and presently the search began again on the second floor; and, to the amaze of the domestics aloft, soon invaded the very garret itself, where first there was found the print of stocking feet on a dusty plank, just as from under a box in the kitchen a pair of shoes were pulled forth never worn by any authorized inmate of those quarters. Then more lanterns went up the back stairs and more prodding followed in the loft, and presently the watchers below heard stifled sounds of excitement and scurry, and then, wild-eyed and striving to be strictly professional, Sergeant Jennison descended and said: "We've got him, sir. He's chokin' like."

And presently again, limp, half-suffocated, smeared with dust and dirt, in shirt sleeves and trousers coated with cobwebs and lint, there was lowered to the second floor and shoved out on the landing at the head of the stairs an almost unrecognizable creature, still struggling for breath. "No man that was n't made of rubber instead of flesh and bones could have doubled himself in where he was," said the corporal to the silent group, and, indeed, it looked as though he were doubling up again, for the knees gave way, the head fell forward, and but for restraining arms down would he have gone. The sergeant propped him up again. The doctor plied a wet sponge, and Félicie, at the door of her mistress' chamber, gasped in amaze: "*Mon Dieu!* the miscreant

who has terrified Madame!" Whereat the dull eyes of the miscreant began slowly to burn, and then to blaze; and, finally, as a faint color showed in his sallow cheek, and the officer of the day, his official captor, bluntly demanded explanation of his being in this house and at this time of night, and both he and Waring and the adjutant, too, as it later appeared, had all swiftly decided that the one explanation, the only one, conceivable would be burglarious intent, to the utter amaze of every man present, to the dismay of Félicie, who screamed aloud, the head went suddenly up and back—oh, how well those who knew the Rays knew that gesture!—the dark eyes flashed in hate and rage, and the "miscreant's" voice rang out in defiance, triumph, almost exultation:

"What explanation? I'd have you know I'm the only man in this post who has legal right in that room. Ask the lady herself."

Dwight's jaw was drooping. Slowly he turned to where Félicie, after one short, half-stifled scream, stood staring wildly upon the prisoner, her hands clasped to her frizzled head. "Ask—this—woman, you mean?" he faltered, in the midst of almost breathless silence.

"That woman? No! *Ask my wife, who lies in that room!*"

Then, before any man could lay hand on and stop him, Dwight had sprung forward and struck the miscreant down.

Next morning the guard report bore the name, as a

prisoner under sentry in hospital, of Private Blenke, of Company "C," and next night did Private Skelton, another patient, a precious tale unfold.

It was true that Skelton had once served in the old—th Cavalry, and, in common with many a man in his troop, had detested his first lieutenant, Foster. It was true that there were now in the garrison of Fort Minneconjou—two in the infantry and one in the cavalry—three men who had an ancient grudge against that officer. It was true that the sight of his hated face, hovering ever about the major's wife, had revived all the old rancor. Two of the number had sworn that if ever a time came when they could wreak their revenge upon him they would do it. He had robbed one man of his sweetheart and two of their liberty, and had driven these two into desertion. Skelton had once been rather well-to-do, but drink and this trouble had ruined him. He had known Blenke as much as a year, had been a "super" in a traveling show company of which Blenke was a member. Blenke was a gymnast and trapeze performer of some note, and not a bad actor in dialect and minor rôles. The company stranded. They were hundreds of miles from "home," without money, hope, or credit. Skelton steered Blenke to a recruiting office, and, once arrived at Minneconjou, Blenke became ambitious. He knew nothing of the regular army before; now he was determined to become an officer. Skelton alone knew anything of Blenke's past, and Skelton promised not to "split." The

coming of Mrs. Dwight brought a remarkable change in Blenke, and when Captain Foster followed her and hung about her all day long, Skelton saw there was something much amiss. Blenke seemed going crazy through watching that lady and that man. Blenke had some clothes of Lieutenant Ray's that he kept hidden at Skidmore's, and Skelton felt sure that when the story went round about Lieutenant Ray's being seen at night, prowling back of the major's quarters, that Blenke was the real culprit. They were talking one day—Skelton and his former chums—of the chance they'd have now of waylaying the captain, and Blenke twitted them of not daring, even if they had the chance. They vowed then that if he would only show them a way, he could count on their doing it, and they did. Blenke had a plan matured, when suddenly the captain left, after the row with Lieutenant Ray, and then Blenke seemed just to take fire. He sent for them and unfolded another. The Captain's train was five hours late and he knew a way to lure him out on the road. He hated him, too, he said, and "we were beginning to see why. He was so dead gone on the lady himself." He fixed the whole business, got a note to the captain, he said, the captain could n't tell from her own writing, and it fetched him out just as was planned, and the rest was pretty much as the captain told it. Skelton at first did n't much care that an officer got credit for it all; Blenke had seen to that. Blenke seemed to hate Lieutenant Ray—though he was

forever copying him—most as much as he hated Foster; but when Skelton got to the agency, got to know Ray, got knocked down at the pow-wow and rescued by Ray, got shot and left to roast to death at the agency, and was again rescued by Ray, Skelton made up his mind that he'd sooner go to Leavenworth for life, if he lived, or to hell if he did n't, than permit Mr. Ray to suffer another day in suspicion. It was Blenke who wore his dress at night and copied his very limp. It was Blenke that kept prowling about the major's, lallygagging with that French maid. It was high time Blenke himself was in limbo, and now they'd got him, they'd be wise to keep an eye on him.

And so, with the case—the two cases—against Sandy Ray abruptly closed, the colonel, the surgeon and the adjutant, who had heard the confession, seemed also to think; for the sentry at the bedside of the mournful-eyed invalid received orders to bayonet him if he attempted to budge.

And all in vain, for, with the dawn of a bleak tomorrow, Private Blenke, no one could begin to say how, had slipped by his possibly drowsing guard and escaped. The prairie, the Minneconjou valley, the trains, were fruitlessly searched. The agile prisoner had fled from the wrath to come.

CHAPTER XXVII

EXEUNT OMNES

THERE is little left to tell. With the vanishing of the mysterious Blenke, "the man of the mournful eyes," there came swift unfolding of the pitiable scheme that, for a time, had set Minneconjou's nerves on edge, bewildering almost every man from the colonel down, and bedeviling most of the women. When one's own mother is ready to believe a man guilty, small blame to the rest of her kind and to the man's best friends that they should be of the same way of thinking. Moreover, neither then nor thereafter did Sandy Ray consider himself an innocent and injured person.

"If ever a fellow came within an ace of falling," said he to himself, and later to his best friend, his father, "it was I; for I believed her story—believed myself loved—believed she had been tricked into throwing me over for Dwight, and that, now that he had thrown her over because of it, and would have no more to do with her, she would soon be free. Then our marriage could follow. A greater ass than I was never lived, but I was sincere in my assininity."

Nor was Sandy Ray the ass he declared himself, for if ever that exquisite, catlike creature, Inez, loved anybody besides herself, she loved Sandy Ray, and was bent on winning him back, cost what it might. She quickly saw that his love for her lay dormant, not dead. She reveled in the joy of her probable power until, all on a sudden, one terrible night there came to her the shock of seeing a face she believed long since buried beneath the waves of the Pacific—that of the boy lover and husband who wooed and won her inflammable heart nearly five years earlier.

Blenke in a romantic epistle to Miss Sanford, Inez, through her lawyers, and her latest dupe, Stanley Foster—whose resignation from the army went eastward by the same train that bore him and that fair fugitive from Minneconjou—and finally the impeccable Farrells, all gave versions more or less veracious of that early marriage episode. But sifted down, this much of truth was ascertained. The two were cousins, with the vehement blood of the Antilles coursing in their veins. They loved, were married by a Texan justice of the peace, and, after a brief honeymoon across the Mexican line—a honeymoon of mingled bliss and battle—found the old people relentless and themselves squabbling and stranded. The elders swooped upon the girl-wife, bore her back to Texas and sent the strolling player to South America, with the promise never to return or bother them. They told her, and she refused to believe, that he speedily met

his death at the hands of a jealous husband in Valparaiso. They later told her, and she fully believed, that, in defiance of his promise and in desire for her, he had determined to reclaim her as they were going to San Francisco, and was washed overboard from the *Colima* by a tidal wave. Inez, like a certain few of her sex, could believe anything possible for love—of her, and Stanley Foster went far toward confirming her views for as much as the month that followed their mad flight. Then, with his commission gone—and his illusions—he found himself bound to a woman whose fast-fading charms were no compensation for anything he had lost. Much of their misery, and her own, was told in metropolitan circles by Félicie, who applied unsuccessfully about this time to Mrs. Gerald Stuyvesant for the position of nursery governess, or *bonne*. Félicie had gone thither in hopes of extracting something from Foster's people, as nothing could be gotten from the Farrells since nothing short of extradition proceedings could induce their return to the States. It was the same miserable old story, and Sandy Ray many a time thanked Heaven, and Stone, and the senior surgeon, for the order that took him to the agency and away from Inez Dwight. Would he have succumbed had he stayed? Older and presumably wiser men have done worse, so why not Sandy? Perhaps mother and Priscilla were not all wrong in their forebodings.

But what a scene of love and repentance and rejoicing

was that when those two women, Aunt Marion and her niece, compared notes over the episode of that night's vigil and Sandy's part therein. Then his story of his coming was true, after all! Priscilla had seen him entering the front gate; had heard him at the door; had heard him pass round to the side of the house. Blenke it was who, counterfeiting even the painful little limp that still hampered Sandy's movements, had caused so many to believe it was Billy Ray's firstborn, in the dead of night, invading the quarters of a brother-officer, to the scandal of the service. They saw it all now, these good people who had dreamed so wildly, and some few there were who went to Ray during the brief fortnight that followed her final disappearance and said: "We knew you could n't have been guilty of such a thought," but Sandy did not thank them. In his downright impulsiveness he had gone to Stone and told him the truth, and said he *had* been guilty of such a thought, and asked the commander what he ought to say to Dwight; and Stone, after pondering over the matter, replied in effect, though not in these precise words, that he'd be d—elighted if he knew.

Time and Dwight solved that problem, as time solves others. The major remained not long at Minneconjou, nor did the Rays. The former, with little Jim ever at his side, went eastward for a while, whence letters came occasionally from both father and son. The latter found divided duties. An interesting event, an arrival extraor-

dinary, called for the presence of Mrs. Ray in distant Manhattan, and Priscilla looked her last for many a day upon the fords of the Minneconjou and those hated tenements on the hither shore, to whose permanence and prosperity her own efforts had lent such unlooked-for aid. A wiser woman in many a way was Priscilla Sanford when she turned her clear eyes eastward again. Firm as before was her faith that she had a mission, but she had learned a lesson still needed by many of her sect, and by many of both sexes. She had a tale to unfold to most excellent theorists in the field that taught a new gospel in the cause of man's uplifting. They were found by Dwight and Jimmy at the seashore, late that summer, and Priscilla strolled hand in hand with her boy friend along the shining sands, and talked long and gravely with his sire as to the real way of reaching the moral nature of the enlisted soldier. They were joined by Sandy for a day or two in September—a rather grave-faced young gentleman, despite recent promotion and longed-for orders to join his troop in far Luzon. They were in no wise startled when a cable came from Colonel Ray—"Grandfather Billy" in spite of his looks—suggesting that they, too, come with Sandy. They were all at Manila in the late autumn, except the Dwights, and long before Christmas Priscilla had found in Colonel Blake, that old-time friend and comrade of Uncle Will, a most delighted listener to her theories. "Legs" was forever stumping round to the bungalow and starting

Priscilla on her hobby, as he called it, and with preternatural gravity "drawing her out" as to the chief end of man. Somebody had told him of her Anti-Canteen and Soldiers' Aid Association at Minneconjou—and of its disruption, but he never twitted her as to that. It was the new scheme for the higher education and mental development of the soldier to which her energies were now bending, and as Blake was in town with little to do but nurse a wounded leg and serve on some perennial court-martial, he found his fun in frequent disquisitions with Priscilla, sometimes prolonging them until Mrs. Ray lost patience and drove him homeward, and privately wrote her liege lord, who was forever afield, running down *ladrones*, that he really must repress that irrepressible wag. "He is n't trying to flirt with Pris, is he?" asked Ray, inconsequently, on coming home, and was dull enough not to catch the full force of his wife's reply. "Flirt? Gerald Blake never knew how, and he's too much in love with his wife; and—besides——"

Priscilla was far too serious to flirt with any man, much as she might long to reform him. She did wish that the long, lank cavalryman could be induced to take her views as seriously as she took them herself, and as Major Dwight seemed to take them, for Dwight's letters were coming at regular intervals, and to Miss Sanford now rather than to Marion Ray, and for a time Priscilla read them aloud for the benefit of Blake, the scoffer, and that of Aunt Marion and Uncle Will, the ever-indul-

gent. And thus that warm, sunshiny Manila winter went its way and the summer rains began to flood the streets, and people took to aquatics, and excursions to Nagasaki and Yokohama; and thither flitted our friends, the elder Rays, with Blake to see them off, and a promise to keep Miss 'Cilla's library project moving. And the day the transport dropped them into waiting sampan in Nagasaki's wondrous harbor two packages of home letters were handed them by the resident quartermaster, just received by rail from Yokohama and the Nippon Maru, and that evening, on the broad white veranda of the old hotel, Priscilla Sanford's cheeks took on the hue of the summer sunset, and still Uncle Billy saw—and Aunt Marion said—nothing.

One afternoon, a few months later, the *Sheridan* dropped anchor a mile or more out in the shallow, land-locked bay of Manila, and the launches and lighters brought the army passengers ashore, many of them for their second visit to the Philippines; and just as the band at the *kiosk* on the Luneta began the daily concert, and carriages of every kind drew up along the curb, and officers in spotless white went cap-doffing from point to point, and fair women smiled and flirted their fans, Colonel Stone, but recently arrived, began telling for the twentieth time, at least, the story of the marvelous escapade by means of which the renowned Blenke secured his final freedom:

“Caught in Chicago; shipped back to the guard-house;

shammed crazy, sir, till he fooled every surgeon in the Cheyenne Valley; got ordered to the government hospital for the insane; got supply of Skidmore whisky, properly doped; got the corporal drunk who went in charge of him, and, by gad, sir, got the corporal's outfit and papers and turned *him* over at Washington as the insane man; got his receipt and vanished—the last ever heard of him. What became of her? Oh, after her flare-up with that poor devil Foster—you know the child did n't live—she got back to Mexico somehow: women like her never die—but she'll never be able to bother Dwight. That marriage, of course, was n't legal. He'd simply been tricked. No, old Dwight's a free man, and I reckon he'll think twice before he tries it again."

Whereupon Stone was swiftly kicked in the shin by the long-legged lieutenant-colonel of cavalry at his side, for, in his enthusiasm, the colonel had turned and addressed his closing remarks to the two ladies in the nearest carriage, and one of them was reddening like the rose.

"Dwight's here, you owl," said Blake, in explanation, later. "Came in on the *Sheridan* this very afternoon, and he is n't so confounded free as you were in your remarks. Why—had n't you *heard*? May be another case of 'out of the frying-pan into the fire'—a toss-up 'twixt 'Cilla and Charybdis, but——"

"Good Lord!" cried Stone, "and what did I say? You don't mean she's going to marry Dwight?"

"She can't help herself. He won't take no for an answer."

"Well—I'll—be—hanged," said Stone, reflectively, "and I ought to be. It's just what my wife said—when the daily readings were going on—would likely be the upshot of the whole business. She said more than that—and she knows women, too—that Priscilla Sanford would make for him the best kind of a wife."

THE END



King, C

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A soldier's trial

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